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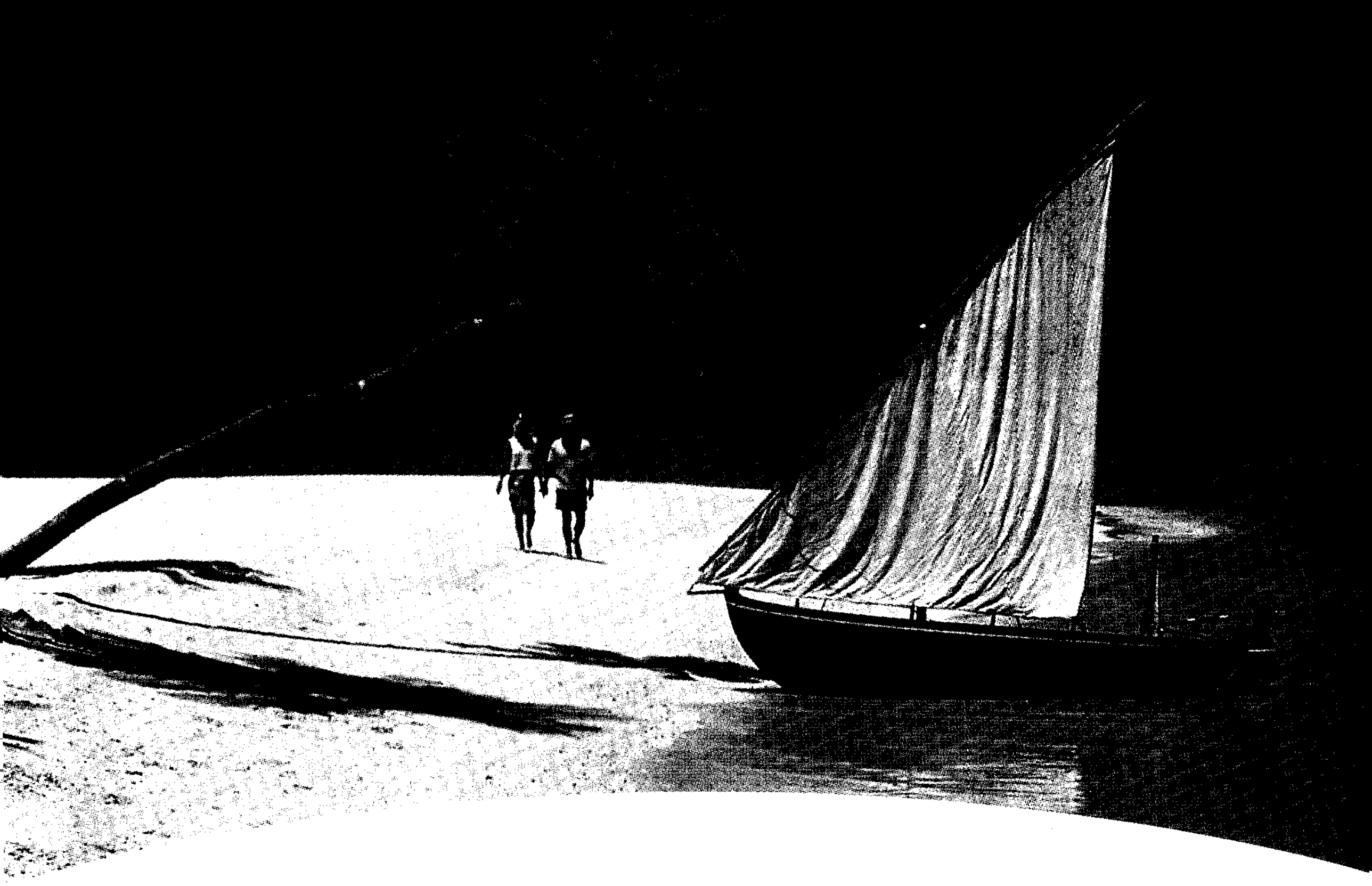

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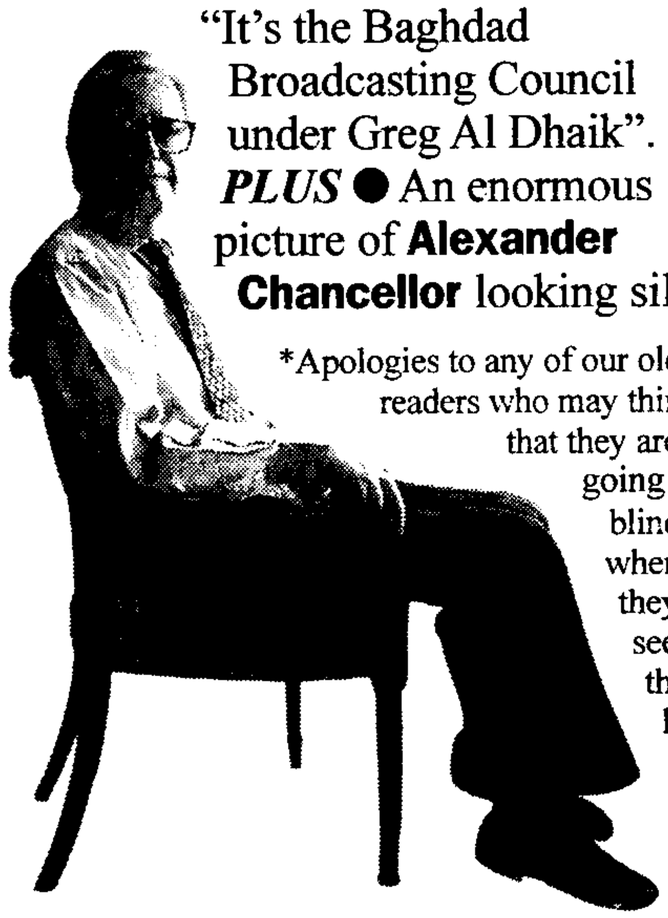
PLUS ● Crazy, hip, right-on, cool new young **Irvine Welsh** writing from America – "Chicago is very windy and cold. It's just like Scotland really, except even windier. There's wind everywhere. No wonder they call this the windy column."

PLUS ● Exciting new young proprietor's wife **Barbara Amiel** on the fact that the BBC is run by Arabs. "It's the Baghdad Broadcasting Council under Greg Al Dhaik".

PLUS ● An enormous picture of **Alexander Chancellor** looking silly.



*Apologies to any of our older readers who may think that they are going blind when they see this logo.

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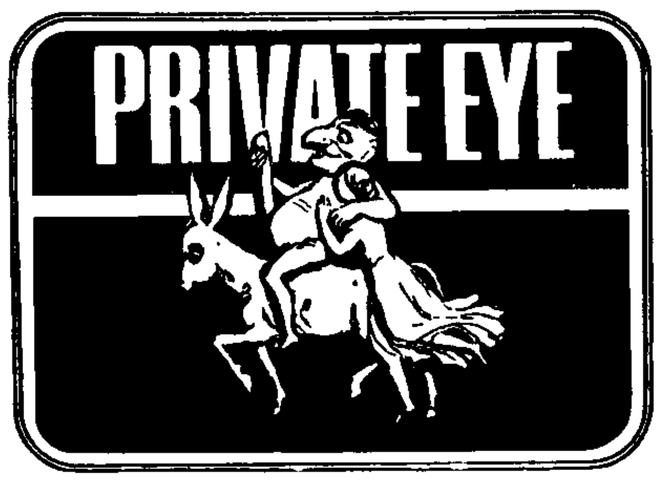

An infallible guide

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BEFORE a shot has been fired, the race is on for contracts to rebuild Iraq.

Time magazine report that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has held a restricted briefing for security-cleared bidders and sent out confidential requests for construction proposals. Initial estimates suggest $900m of work will be available repairing infrastructure – "bridges, roads, ports, hospitals and schools" – destroyed in the war. The figure excludes both work on Iraq's oilfields, and contracts to build new military bases in the region.

Curiously, many of the firms likely to rebuild Iraq will be among those who have helped demolish it. President Bush has appointed retired Lieutenant General Jay Garner as head of the Pentagon's "Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance", which will be central to rebuilding Iraq. Garner was until last month the president of arms firm SY Coleman, which makes targeting systems for missiles and tanks.

Dick Cheney's old firm Halliburton are strongly tipped for Iraqi reconstruction. International engineers with both construction and oilfield experience, Halliburton also have many contracts to feed and house American troops. They also have experience in working for Saddam. Halliburton subsidiaries Dresser Rand and Dresser Pump sold $73m of oilfield equipment to Saddam from 1997 to 2000, when Cheney was in charge.

HOME OFFICE ministers have suddenly changed the rules for Iraqis who come to Britain claiming asylum.

In future Iraqis who fall short of being granted full asylum, but who qualify for entry into the UK under the lesser "exceptional leave to remain" (ELR) criteria, will only be allowed to stay for six months instead of the four years permitted to other nationalities.

Is this because ministers are confident that after a swift surgical strike, any Iraqis here will rush home to live safely under the protection of the US? Well, maybe. Or could it be intended to deter war refugees heading for Britain, in the hope that they will go somewhere else instead?

AS AMERICA prepares to go to war with Iraq, with or without UN backing, Iran is suing America at the UN's highest court – for backing Iraq in the 1980s by blowing up Iranian oil wells and supplying Saddam with, er, weapons of mass destruction.

Iran launched its suit against the US in 1992 at the International Court of Justice. It wants compensation for the destruction of three oil platforms in 1987 and 1988. The US says it destroyed the platforms only after Iran mined the waters of the Gulf and launched a rocket attack on a US-flagged tanker. Iran says it was fighting a fierce war with Saddam's Iraq, and laid the mines to stop shipments of arms, including material used in chemical and biological weapons, from America to Iraq.

The wheels of international justice turn so slowly that this case has only just reached the court. The initial reaction of the US was to argue the court had no jurisdiction – a position rejected in 1996. And if the court rules against the US, it could well ignore the judgment anyway, as it did when ordered to pay compensation to Nicaragua for mining its harbours during the covert war against the Sandinistas.

ON THE EVE of war, British and American forces are proudly unveiling their new weapons – and they're bigger and better than ever!

The RAF promises its new "Paveway" bombs will work even when it's cloudy (unlike their predecessors) and will be precise enough to avoid "collateral damage". The Americans meanwhile, have rather spoiled the perception that "smart bombs" keep civilian casualties to a minimum by unveiling the experimental "Massive Ordnance Air Burst" (MOAB) munition, a 21,000 bomb the size of a car with an explosive effect "similar to a small nuclear weapon". The MOAB is a bigger version of the "daisycutter" used in Afghanistan and, like its predecessor, will be dumped out of the back of Hercules aeroplanes. Unlike the daisycutter, which floated down on a parachute before unleashing its fuel-air explosive charge, the MOAB is satellite guided – although its wide destructive power means that increased precision will not avoid "collateral damage" unless it is dropped in very isolated areas.

The people of Moab, a town in Utah, have protested because, according to their mayor, they are "pretty much appalled" at their involuntary connection to such destruction.

ACTORS, lawyers and private finance initiative contract workers – could London run without them? Not according to one housing association which has designated them all as "key workers" entitled to cut-price homes in a new development.

Housing Association Threshold Key Homes are selling 166 flats in the swanky riverside Chelsea Bridge Wharf for "low cost ownership". Of these, 112 will be only available to previously recognised key workers, such as nurses, teachers and fire-fighters, for 40 per cent of the open market value.

But Threshold are offering the remaining 54 flats at 90 percent of market value to the newly defined "key workers". Those eligible include solicitors who are "primarily engaged with public sector work", actors, people working in tourism and, er, workers for PFI contractors.

AN INTERESTING choice of sponsor at the upcoming 2003 national transport awards: the "outstanding contribution to transport" prize is to be given by rail maintenance company Jarvis.

So what have Jarvis's contributions to transport been lately? Jarvis have had four health and safety convictions since 1999 (including two freight train derailments) with fines totalling £500,000. Meanwhile the firm remains at the centre of the HSE's investigation into last May's Potters Bar rail crash, as it was responsible for maintaining the track involved.

"Peace!" *"War!"*

Street of Shame

AFTER running her conman boyfriend out of the country and reviling her as a "sex machine" with a "psychopathic personality" who was not only a crank but an agent for dangerous religious cults, how did the *Mail on Sunday* manage to persuade Carole Caplin to come on board as their "fabulous new lifestyle columnist"?

The people responsible were Christina Appleyard, the bulldog-like editrix of the paper's "Night and Day" supplement where the column appears, and low-rent celeb fixer Ian Monk, who added Caplin to a client list which includes such luminaries as Richard Desmond and Claire Sweeney when the "Cheriegate" scandal broke.

Caplin instructed Monk to keep her profile high beyond the end of the scandal, and Appleyard, who has become something of an expert at sweet-talking PRs due to her editorial policy of rubbishing celebs and then demanding exclusives, schmoozed him with ease. She emphasised the separate nature of "Night and Day" from the main paper, offered a sympathetic puff-interview, and even offered to turn 11 pages over to Ms Caplin's favourite photos of herself. By the time executives on the main paper became involved, the Caplin column was already a done deal (and, incidentally, one which came in at considerably less than the £80 grand reported elsewhere). Just to prove how separate a fiefdom "Night and Day" is, the main paper commissioned Lauren Booth to savage Caplin as her half sister's "scary stalker" on the very day her column began.

So what does Appleyard hope to get for her money? The format which was agreed on is more Bitch than Barefoot Doctor – Caplin is under instruction to make a thinly-veiled attack on one of her many enemies each week, and tack some holistic health tips on to the end.

The big prize, however, lies elsewhere. Appleyard has been assured that Caplin knows some "really serious shit" on the Blairs, and it didn't take long to convince *MoS* editor Peter Wright that when she and Monk feel her profile needs a further boost, it would be a very good idea for the paper to be there, ready and waiting.

THE PLAN to hand out free copies of the *Daily Mail* to anti-war marchers on the streets of London will not go down in history as one of Associated Newspapers' better ideas.

After several copies were set on fire and dumped in the Thames by irate marchers, the paper's tabarded distributors were advised by police and stewards to beat a hasty retreat.

Mail on Sunday editor Peter Wright, who had led his paper's coverage with the words "Britain found its voice and led the world in the march towards peace", had a simple explanation for the incident at the following week's sales meeting: the marchers were just "riff-raff" and the "usual suspects" who couldn't be expected to know what to do with a civilised newspaper even if they were offered one free.

LYNDA-LEE POTTER's penetrating insights in the *Daily Mail* really are worth her huge fee. Take her piece on TV presenter Matthew Kelly, the day after police said they would not be pursuing groundless allegations of child abuse against him.

"He looks greyer, older and strained," wrote Lee-Potty on page 13 on 26 February. "He has shaved his head and beard as though he wanted to bare not only his features but his soul. 'I've nothing to hide' is the subliminal message…" On the other hand, those who prefer their messages in less subliminal form could have read a news story on page 19 of the same edition of the *Mail*: "The 6ft 5in actor, who has shaved his beard and head for his current theatre role…"

"THIS NEWSPAPER is heartily sick of timid, lily-livered politicians who talk a lot and do nothing. This is why we greatly admire the Labour Party's prodigal son, London mayor Ken Livingstone. He is a rare breed, a real leader who is prepared to stick his neck out to do what he thinks is right."

The newspaper in question, incredibly, is the *Sunday Express*, not hitherto a cheerleader for either socialists or new taxes. But its fawning editorial delighted Richard "Dirty" Desmond, who has decreed that there will be no attacks on Red Ken or London's congestion charge in his newspapers.

As ever with Dirty Des's political allegiances, there is a simple financial motive. He is soon to launch the *Evening Mail*, a London freesheet in direct competition with two of Lord Rothermere's titles, *Metro* and the *Evening Standard*. Since the *Standard* has waged a long vendetta against Livingstone, Desmond calculates that the mayor might lend a hand if smothered with enough compliments – and help him bypass the deal between London Underground and Associated Newspapers which allows *Metro* exclusive distribution rights in Tube stations.

It seems that the charm offensive may already be working. "Private monopolies are inherently bad for the consumer and for business in general," Livingstone told the *Indie* last Friday. "There is clearly a strong case for greater competition in the London newspaper market, which is entirely controlled by the *Evening Standard*." Can a flattering feature about the mayor and his lovely girlfriend in *OK!* magazine be far behind?

TRINITY MIRROR'S two dailies were outraged by the Office of Fair Trading's revelation that Argos and the Littlewoods-owned Index chain had conspired to fix the price of children's toys and games.

"KERPLUNKED! Record £22.6m Fine For Stores Over Toy Price Fix," reported the *Daily Mirror*, noting that of the two conspirators Argos had been hit by far the hardest. "Argos must pay £17.28m of the record penalty, reflecting its higher turnover." Under the headline "YOU TWISTERS", the *Mirror*'s Scottish sister-paper, the *Daily Record*, accused the stores of "hitting parents in the pocket".

Quite so. But, presumably for space reasons, neither the *Mirror* nor the *Record* mentioned that the chairman of Argos's parent company, GUS, is none other than Sir Victor Blank – chairman of Trinity Mirror, and stalwart defender of Piers "Viglen" Moron's own financial probity.

IF IT'S motoring advice you want you can trust the *Mail on Sunday's* expert Russell Bray. The tousle-haired Fangio was flown to Spain's Catalunya Formula 1 racing circuit on 12 February to test drive the new Vauxhall VX220 Turbo, an impish little rear wheel drive sportster.

Much to the amusement of the other hacks on the junket, Bray emerged sporting special motor racing booties, designed for high-performance driving. He proceeded to burn off… and then spun into the barrier, leaving Vauxhall's perplexed engineers to try and reconstruct the mutilated rear-end at a cost of several thousand pounds.

When Bray came to explain himself to the appalled PR man, rather than apologise he said he had crashed because he sneezed.

THE *Daily Mail* has won an interim injunction against Richard Desmond over his plan to call his new freesheet the *Evening Mail*. Meanwhile, IPC Media is threatening legal action against Dirty Des on the grounds that his latest celebrity mag, *New!*, appears to be almost identical in appearance to IPC's *Now*.

Tut tut! Desmond, of all people, ought to know that "passing off" is very naughty indeed, since he himself never hesitates to reach for his lawyers when he's the victim. Only a few months ago he threatened action against a porn mag called *Park Lane*, merely because its cover included the line "Treasure-Hunting – X Marks the Spot". With an entirely straight face, Des's lawyers insisted that because Desmond runs the satellite porn station "Television X / The Fantasy Channel" he can claim exclusive rights to, er, the letter X.

THE EPIC "Porn Wars" contest between Richard Desmond and his former pornographer-in-chief Deric Botham should have reached the High Court at the beginning of February, but was delayed following a last-minute decision by Desmond's lawyers to apply for "mediation".

By a remarkable coincidence, the postponement was requested just after Dirty Des had belatedly noticed that the trial was due to start on the same day – and in the same building – as the case brought by himself, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones against *Hello!* magazine.

The Botham trial would have featured much lurid evidence about Desmond's porn websites and "adult magazines". How embarrassing for Dirty Des if his graceful chums Michael and Catherine had got to hear of the sordid stuff emerging in a nearby courtroom! And how fortunate that he managed to forestall this dreadful prospect, thus managing to pose as a "respectable publisher" for the duration of the Hollywood stars' visit.

ON 24 February, *Mirror* readers were confronted with the huge front-page headline FERGIE: I'M AGAINST IRAQ WAR.

The Fergie in question was not the Duchess of York but Sir Alex Ferguson. The *Daily Moron* was delighted to reveal that the "fiery football boss" had come out against the war.

However, as with many of the *Moron*'s recent front page splashes (see *Eye* 1072), the story was nothing more than a straight lift from another source. In this case, the quote was from a *Times* interview which appeared two days earlier.

Six days earlier, following Ferguson's dressing-room "assault" on David Beckham, a *Moron* editorial headed "Fergie's Shame" had denounced the Man Utd manager as "a hot-headed lout" who should be "ashamed" of his behaviour.

But it was soon back to the respectful "Sir Alex" when the *Mirror* decided the erstwhile lout was now a major geopolitical heavyweight who deserved the utmost respect.

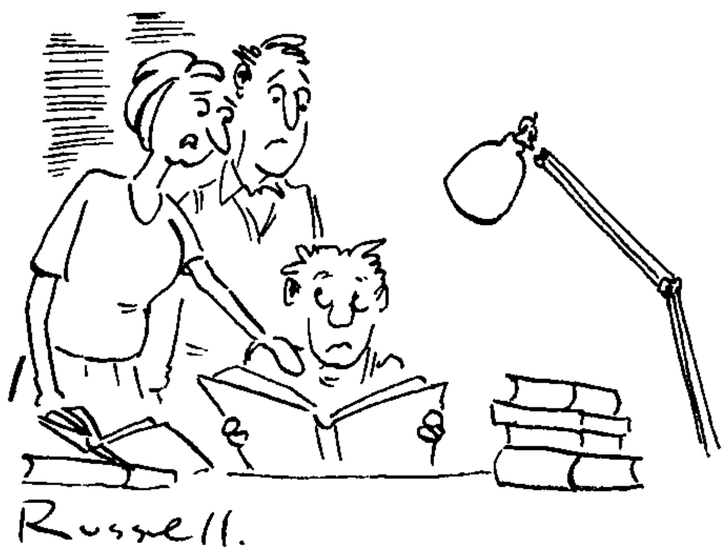
JUST FANCY THAT!

"Cherie Blair is her proverbial fat, ugly friend… Every school has a Carole. Short on brains, long on vivacity and charisma, they pull themselves up by the straps of their trainer bra and get by on little else than the fact that every boy fancies them and every girl wants to be their friend in the vicarious hope that some of the sexual pixie dust might settle on their shoulders too."

— Jane Moore on Carole Caplin, *The Sun*, 11 December 2002.

"Beside her Mrs Blair looks like a heffalump, a plain lolloping, big-hipped heffalump… But, like the ugly teenager whose best mate is a breathtaking beauty, [Cherie] keeps the beauty close by, desperately hoping some of the magic dust *might* just rub off on her."

— Carole Malone on Carole Caplin, *Sunday Mirror*, 23 February 2003.



"If you keep studying for your A levels you'll never get to university"

GUILTY AS CHARGED

DOES the esteemed columnist and former *Times* editor Simon Jenkins have an identically-named twin? It's hard to think of any other explanation for the recent articles appearing under that byline.

On 19 February, Jenkins wrote a *Times* column hailing the success of Ken Livingstone's congestion charge, which "appears to have worked" despite the predictions of doom.

The very next day, however, a leader-page article by Jenkins in the London *Evening Standard* gave an altogether gloomier view. "Eventually I predict the impact on congestion will be negligible," he wrote.

Confused? Blame the hacks, then. "For three months, the nation has been whipped into a frenzy over this reform," Jenkins noted in his *Times* column. "Gleeful predictions of fiasco, shambles, gridlock and the impending death of urban society have consumed the media…Public opinion has made a fool of itself. But public opinion in this case has been articulated largely by journalists."

And by one *Evening Standard* columnist in particular, though Jenkins coyly omitted to mention it. Last August he argued that the charge "has nothing to do with congestion – and should not have been referred to as such. It will not reduce congestion…It will just clutter the streets with ugly cameras". A better title for the congestion charge, he suggested, would be "a tax from hell".

LUVVIES

It suddenly hit me that even after all these years, I have never really learned how to act. I ran to my trailer and shut the door. I kept saying to myself, "I want to quit... I want to go home". And Anthony (Hopkins) knocked at the door and said very calmly, "It's pretty scary stuff, acting, isn't it?"

JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT
Night and Day Magazine

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Knitting is the new cocaine." – Esther Addley, *Guardian.*

"Sleep is the new sex." – Margaret Carlson, *Time* magazine.

"Dead is the new alive." – Fiona Lawrenson, BBC *Gardeners' World.*

"Self-harm is the new rock'n'roll." – *Uncut* magazine.

"Cardamom is the new coriander." – Roopa Gulati, *Daily Telegraph.*

"Dull is the new interesting." -- Jeremy Clarkson, *Sunday Times.*

"Swapping is the new keeping it to yourself." – Fiona Leith, *Scotland on Sunday.*

"How mobiles have become the new handbags." – Jessica Brinton, *Sunday Times Style.*

"Bottoms: The New Cleavage." – Cover-line on *Tatler.*

NIKEWATCH

Just Plug It

THE YOUNG English footballer Alan Smith wears Nike boots. If you didn't know this important fact you are clearly not a reader of the *Sun*'s sports section, which has mentioned Smith's allegiance several times lately. The campaign of puffery culminated in this announcement on 22 February: "YOU can follow in Alan Smith's footsteps – thanks to top sports firm Nike. They will let you customise your football boots, just like Smith does. Log on to www.nikefootball.com – select Nike ID and choose your colours, name and number."

In *Eye* 1067 we drew attention to an interview with rugby star Lawrence Dallaglio in *Observer Sport Monthly (OSM)*, which had been granted only on condition that it included the following photo-caption: "Lawrence Dallaglio is wearing a Dri-FIT Tech Top, a Dri-FIT compressible pant and an Air Storm Crested Butte, all of which are part of Nike's new 'Storm' range." The interviewer, Euan Ferguson, did at least try to atone for this drivel by adding an unflattering reference to Nike's dubious employment policies in Asia, but *OSM*'s timorous editor, Matt Tench, excised it.

Who can blame him? Sports editors know that advertorial-style coverage of Nike products is the price they pay for access to the company's portfolio of sporting heroes; and a quick audit of the last year reveals that one daily newspaper in particular has embraced this unholy pact beyond the call of duty. One might wonder why Nike needs to advertise at all, when the *Sun*'s fearless sports hacks are so eager to plug its wares at every opportunity…

19 January 2002. A photo-op of footballer Paul Lambert provides a convenient promotion vehicle for a certain boot-maker. "Life is just bootiful [geddit?] for Celtic midfielder Paul Lambert with his new Nike Air Zoom total boots. The high-tech footwear was perfect for Lambo when he wore them for the first time last week and scored against Kilmarnock."

23 February. Another exciting photo shoot, and the good news is that Nike manufactures shirts as well as boots. "Alan Smith and David O'Leary saw the light yesterday – and rated it simply fantastic. Leeds striker Smith (pictured top) was sporting Nike's revolutionary new light kit range, which will be keeping plenty of World Cup stars cool in Japan and South Korea, while his boss was lumbered with gear from his era." Just how light would that be then? "Smith's Nike Cool-motion kit weighs just 400 grams, his Nike Mercurial-vapour boots only 195 grams and the Geo-Merlin vapour ball, to be used in the Premiership next season, 350 grams."

23 March. In the latest of many *Sun Sport* exclusives, Manchester United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gives his verdict on the season. "The team is very positively charged. There is that same feeling of self-belief and confidence we had in 1999. We've done well in Europe in reaching the last eight while we now have a chance in the league again." On what does he base his optimism? "Solskjaer was talking to *Sun Sport* after testing Nike's new Mercurial Vapor Boot – at just 194g per boot, they are lighter than the track spikes worn by sprint king Maurice Greene at the Sydney Olympics." If that's not enough to get your juices flowing, there's an extra appetite-whetter: "To find out more about Nike's new mysterious Scorpion adverts, log on to www.nikefootball.com."

03 April. The waiting is nearly over for those Scorpion ads. "Eric Cantona has joined Monty Python's Flying Circus for the most sensational football advert in TV history…In the new Nike ad, to be released worldwide tomorrow, Cantona is dressed in a suit and wielding a walking cane as he cheers on players like Thierry Henry, Luis Figo and Roberto Carlos." Truly sensational!

13 April. We haven't heard the end of the Scorpions. "Nike's new Scorpion Knockout Tournament, which aims to get kids in London playing three-a-side football, gets the thumbs up from Sol Campbell. The game is just like the new Nike TV ad featuring Eric Cantona." Those interested in taking part are directed to that old familiar address, the Nike website.

19 September. It's been all quiet on the football front over the summer. Despite Solskjaer's Nike-fuelled confidence, United have failed to triumph in the League or in Europe. Meanwhile at the World Cup, the likes of Luis Figo, Thierry Henry and assorted other Nike stars perform conspicuously poorly.

05 October. Footie's back and Robbie Keane is in bullish mood as he discloses to *Sun Sport* his plans to take the Premiership by storm. How will he achieve this? "Robbie Keane aims to get back on the goalscoring trail with his special new boots. They are the Nike Mercurial Vapors which are so sleek they are two grams lighter than the track shoes Maurice Green wore to win the Olympic 100 metres title in Sydney." How can he possibly fail?

26 October. Aston Villa's Darius Vassell has a similar story to tell as he contemplates taking on the mighty Manchester United. Will he be using the oh-so-sleek Mercurial Vapors? No, but it's okay: Vassell "hopes to find the sweet spot at Old Trafford with the help of his Nike Air Zoom Total 90 II boots that have air in the soles for extra comfort."

9 November. Wonder-boy Wayne Rooney arrives on the scene, and former pro David Fairclough is on hand to outline the commercial rewards that might be on offer to the teenage prodigy. "For the past five years I have worked for Nike in the North West and my job is to identify promising young talent for possible boot sponsorship deals. So I have been watching Wayne's development since he was a 13-year-old long before most people were aware of him."

7 December. It's the big Man Utd. v. Arsenal match and the *Sun* boasts exclusive interviews with respective strikers Ruud van Nistelrooy and Thierry Henry. Aside from their goal-scoring prowess, do the pair have anything else in common? By happy coincidence, they do indeed. "Thierry Henry and Ruud Van Nistelrooy both wear Nike's ultra-light Mercurial Vapor boots. We have a pair to give away, with one boot signed by each player, together with a Nike Geo Merlin Vapor ball, as used in today's match."

14 February 2003. Rumours circulate that Brazilian star Ronaldo could be on his way to Arsenal. But how would the Gunners be able to afford the World Cup winner's huge wage demands? Help may be at hand from a trusty friend. "Ronaldo, like the Treble-chasing Gunners, is contracted to Nike – so the Highbury board could find the sportswear company ready to contribute to the striker's wages and bonuses."

Never mind Ronaldo: with publicity like this, shouldn't Nike be picking up *Sun Sport*'s wage bill as well?

THE Home Secretary only has himself to blame for the mauling he received from Mr Justice Collins over asylum seekers.

David Blunkett tried to deny asylum seekers any means of support by way of a last-minute amendment to a Bill. MPs should have had more than 15 minutes to debate it. And he should not have misled everyone by stating that those refused support would have a right of appeal to an asylum support adjudicator.

That there was *no* right of appeal and *no* independent safety check for people left literally on the streets. This was the reason the judge ruled against the government.

PS. Following *Eye* 1074's report that in order to fulfil Blunkett's promise to fast-track all **new** asylum claims, the Immigration and Nationality Department had stopped processing thousands of pre-1999 cases, an instruction has gone out lifting the ban.

HOME SECRETARY David Blunkett was typically sympathetic when Asian families complained that their sons, caught up in rioting in Leeds and Bradford in 2001, had received unduly harsh sentences. The parents should just stop "whining" he said.

Despite the fact that most had no previous convictions, and many had given themselves up to police, dozens of young Asian men were jailed for up to five years for throwing the odd stone.

At Leeds Crown Court, Judge Norman Jones – the recorder of Leeds – had proved himself to be particularly keen on jailing young Asians who admitted offences of violent disorder during the city's Harehills riots.

In February a group of white youths appeared at Leeds crown court, also charged with violent disorder, after a three-hour riot at the end of a rock festival. Mobs attacked police and caused hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage.

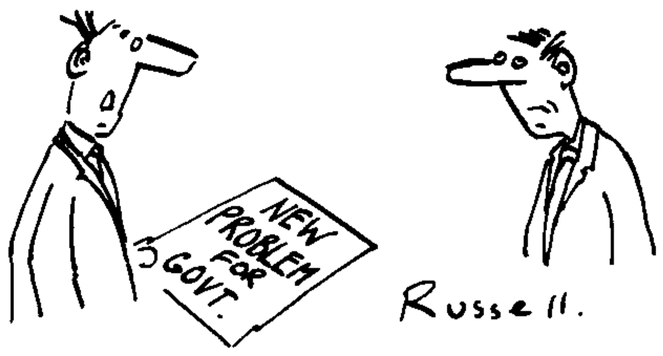
No prison sentences were handed out. The young whites were sentenced instead to between 130 and 240 hours of community service each. And who was the bleeding heart liberal judge presiding over this case? Norman Jones.

MUSICIANS' claims that the new Live Music Licensing Bill was too draconian are borne out by the number of amendments and clarifications it has already undergone since being published in January.

Last week culture minister Kim Howells amended the Bill to ensure that musicians would not end up being jailed for playing in unlicensed venues. An earlier amendment exempted places of worship and community halls outside London from the restrictions.

Meanwhile a leaflet has been published, stating that under the latest draft testing a musical instrument in a shop, church bell ringing, a postman whistling on his round, carol singing and "spontaneous singing of Happy Birthday" will not be licensable activities.

But what about planned singing of "Happy Birthday"? Best apply for a licence just in case.



*"What do you reckon? Launch an initiative, set a target... or actually **do** something?"*

Number crunching

–20%

■ fall in number of NHS beds since advent of internal market

+30%

■ rise in number of NHS managers since advent of internal market

AS ONE of the Cabinet's most loyal Blairites, Alan Milburn supports the war effort. Or does he?

"Conceiving itself to be the world's policeman, the USA has sought to secure what it sees as the West's interest by interfering in Third World countries," he wrote in *Exploding the Nuclear Myth – How to Fight the Missiles*, a pamphlet published 20 years ago by the West Newcastle Nuclear Disarmament Group. In a frenzy of outrage, Red Al concluded that "our adversaries are many: not merely the British parliament, nor the British military establishment; not merely the American government, military or multinational armaments companies; not merely Nato. We fight all of these and we fight as well a history of British subservience to US interests which stretches back to at least 1945."

Do we indeed? Or have "we" now decided that discretion is the better part of valour?

DOWN THE TUBES

THE Stratford tunnel collapse made news around the world when a massive hole opened up in east London gardens as work on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link appeared to run into ancient wells. The HSE are still investigating the incident.

Despite the extensive reporting, no journalist noticed that Bechtel, the engineers supervising the works, were recently put in charge of another set of tunnels, having taken over a third of the Underground. They are the senior partner in Tubelines, the new owner of the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines, with self-destructing privatisation specialists Jarvis and Amey.

Warballs

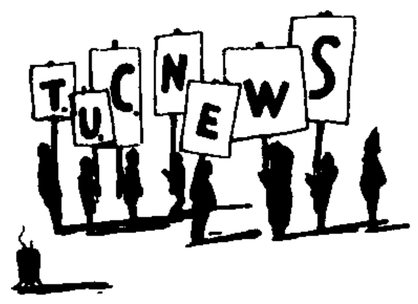
■ "Council leader Steve Foulkes said the [council tax] rise was due to increases in such areas as public liability insurance due to mounting compensation claims, public sector pay and the aftermath of 11 September." — *Wirral Globe.*

■ "Sussex chief constable Ken Jones has made plans on how to police the county if war breaks out in Iraq." — *Mid-Sussex Times.*

■ "A fast food restaurant in North Carolina has renamed its french fries in protest at the French stance on Iraq. Neil Rowland, the owner of Cubbie's restaurant in Beaufort, says he now serves freedom fries. He says he isn't doing it to offend French people but as a show of support for President Bush and US troops." — *Associated Press.*

■ "For Leslie Mills, Park Avenue wife, mother and former big-time Ford model, 11 September prompted a different sort of scrutiny. 'For a while I'd been thinking about cosmetic surgery,' she says. 'But 11 September was a real awakening. I thought, nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. What am I waiting for?'" — American *Elle* magazine.

■ "Will the product(s) be used in connection with weapons of mass destruction, i.e. nuclear applications, missile technology, or chemical or biological weapons purposes?" — *Questionnaire supplied with new Dell computers, showing a trusting faith in customers' honesty.*



SIGNS ARE that Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons, joint general secretary of Amicus, is losing his grip among his hitherto loyal band of supporters on the all important general purposes and finance committee (GPFC), who have the awesome responsibility of adjudicating on pay rise applications from union officials, including the great Currant Bun himself.

Never one to underestimate his own worth, Lyons recently claimed a hefty 30 per cent pay rise, which would have taken his salary to £120,000 (excluding the cost of his full-time chauffeur). However, in a break with tradition, the GPFC not only gave the claim short shrift but also refused to refer the matter to his friends at the TUC for arbitration.

With Lyons's exorbitant claim embarrassingly leaked, itself another sign of his increasing isolation, some insiders believe that the time will soon be ripe to ditch the beleaguered general secretary, who has enjoyed a charmed existence for so long.

MEANWHILE Lyons has, hilariously, got on to the trade unionists' *University Challenge* team (along with the general secretary of Natfhe and two others).

As long as there are plenty of questions about the price of buns and the tax deductibility of bathroom radios, the brothers should find it a breeze.

Down On The Fish Farm

SUPERMARKETS face a challenge following the European Commission's decision to cut levels of a chemical colourant allowed in farm salmon feed because of the danger it poses to human health.

How can they persuade shoppers who are used to buying fish that is so stuffed with artificial colour (such as the banned canthaxanthin E161g) that it is virtually day-glo orange, that the duller stuff is as "good"? Without colourant a farmed fish's flesh would naturally be muddy grey.

Ever resourceful, Safeway has come up with an advertising campaign that manages to camouflage both the fact that its salmon is fake (ie farmed) and that what colour it does have has been produced artificially by a toxic "suntan" lotion that damages human eyesight, albeit at reduced levels.

While it enthuses about how wild salmon like to return to the same river each year to spawn, there's no room to mention the raft of toxic chemicals and drugs (pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls, polybrominated diphenal ethers, et al) that are used to keep fake salmon alive until they are slaughtered. Odd that.

Of course, many sick farm salmon don't live long enough to be slaughtered. So what happens to them? Some are minced up and used as protein in animal food; others are emulsified and sold to the cosmetics industry as an oil base for use in the manufacture of beauty care products. But the Scottish Executive (SE) claims that the bulk of "morts", as dead salmon are known in the trade, are dumped in approved landfill sites.

Which approved landfill sites? A spokesperson for the government's fisheries research services said: "We don't keep records of this but the local authorities will know." And indeed they do. Colin Clark, Highland council's head of waste management, says that none of their sites has been used for this purpose.

The Scottish environment pollution agency (Seap) warns that dead salmon can pose a serious health hazard if not disposed of properly. So, can Seap tell us how many dead salmon were buried during the past year, and where they were buried? Yes, you guessed right – they haven't a clue.

'Old Trout'

THE SAME OLD TORY

THE ROW in the Tory Party, we are told, is between the "traditionalists", led by IDS and his new chief executive Barry Legg on the one hand and, on the other, the "modernisers" led by Michael Portillo and sacked chief executive Mark Macgregor.

This is a simplistic version of the true story, which has its roots in the corrupt rein of the former leader of Westminster Council, Shirley Porter. Almost all the characters in the current row were active in the Porter saga. Barry Legg was her chief whip. Mark Macgregor and his company Marketforce were hired by Westminster Council to help with "public relations". Macgregor had led the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) when that organisation had to be disbanded for unruly and extremist behaviour by the then Tory Party chairman Norman Tebbit (*Eyes passim*). Other *dramatis personae* were two of Porter's most prominent supporters, Nicki Woodhead-Page, who joined the council in 1990 and is normally described as a "former model", and Simon Milton, who attended many of the crucial meetings where the gerrymandering was implemented. Legg was closely questioned by the district auditor John Magill in his famous inquiry into the affair, but somehow escaped censure. Woodhead-Page joined the council after the gerrymandering was over. Porter and her chief supporter, David Weeks, were found responsible for reckless and enormous misuse of ratepayers' money on schemes to rig the vote in council elections, and were ordered by the auditor to pay a surcharge of some £40m. The surcharge has still not been paid, and most of the appeals procedure is now exhausted. The man chiefly responsible for getting the money back for the ratepayers is the current Tory leader of Westminster council, Simon Milton.

What happened to the Porterlistas as the years went on? Barry Legg was Tory MP for Milton Keynes until he lost the seat in 1997. He was a fervent member of the right-wing No Turning Back Group, in which he teamed up with one of the group's little-known backbenchers, Iain Duncan-Smith. Both men admired the stand of John "Vulcan" Redwood, then a cabinet minister, when he stood for the Tory leadership against John Major in 1996. Redwood's campaign had the glamorous and enthusiastic support of Nicky Woodhead-Page, who surprised many commentators with her assertion that Redwood had lovely legs. Years later, when IDS became leader, he appointed Mark Macgregor as chief executive of the Tory Party, and almost immediately started to fall out with him. The appointment of Macgregor shocked Lord (Norman) Tebbit, *eminence grise* of the Party's Right, who no doubt recalled his brush with Macgregor's FCS more than a decade previously.

An early sign of the simmering old feud was the row over the Tory candidate for Mayor of London. Tebbit suddenly announced that he was supporting Nicky Woodhead-Page for the post. This didn't go down too well with Macgregor. Woodhead-Page was eased out of the running, and replaced with that familiar Tory stand-by Steven Norris. Howls of rage from Woodhead-Page and her supporters can still be heard. IDS, too, was unhappy. He felt the control of the party slipping away from him and decided to take a stand and restore the party to its right-wing roots. Out went right-wing Macgregor, former PR man for Shirley Porter, and in came right-wing Barry Legg, former chief whip to Shirley Porter. Tebbit is happy with the swap. So is Redwood, who reckons his time has come again. But Michael Portillo, by now thoroughly committed to Mark Macgregor and co, plainly is not.

The Westminster connection will soon re-emerge. First, the courts are still pursuing the unpaid surcharge. Secondly, there is yet another report from John Magill to come. For the past eight years he has been working on his report on the decision of Westminster Council to move about 100 families into tower blocks riddled with asbestos. A report in 1996 by John Barratt, former chief executive of Cambridgeshire county council, found a) that the decision to move the families was politically motivated – moving Labour voters from marginal seats into safe Labour ones – and b) that the council knew perfectly well there were health risks from the asbestos but did nothing to remove it. McGill's report will of course investigate Barratt's allegations, and his findings will be of special interest to the members of the secret "chairmen's group" on Westminster Council which, in February 1989, voted to move the families. One member of the group was Simon Milton, now leader of Westminster Council. Another was Barry Legg, now chief executive of the Tory Party.

ON 11 February the High Court gave Shirley Porter, now resident in Israel, seven days to either explain what had happened to her £70m fortune or face being in contempt of court.

Lady Tesco, who owes a £37m surcharge for her part in the gerrymandering scandal that engulfed Westminster council under her leadership in the 1980s, responded to a previous High Court order last December that she disclose her assets by informing the court that she was down to her last £300,000. However this time round, Dame Shirl refused to play ball after the High Court demanded that she disclose details of all of her transactions world-wide of more than £100,000 during the last nine years.

Her lack of response adds to suspicions that she deliberately divested herself of her fortune by "giving it away" to family and friends, rather than pay what she owes. Her non-compliance with the order means she faces imprisonment should she set foot on UK soil again.

Family and friends who benefited from her largesse may yet end up regretting their association with the disgraced dame, facing as they do the threat that if identified they could find themselves in contempt of court and their assets frozen.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE NEVER-ENDING saga of Nina Ashurst takes yet another turn with a new job that should be remarkably familiar to the wife of former Doncaster College principal Terry Ashurst.

In 2001 Nina stepped down as head of personnel at Doncaster soon after her husband quit as principal. She had earlier been forced to step down as clerk to the governors after revelations by the *Eye* and others that she had broken Lord Nolan's recommendations on independence. A tribunal over Ashurst's sacking of trade union activist John Giddens revealed that correct recruitment procedures had not been followed when Ashurst chose his wife to be one of his senior staff.

Last summer Nina took up the job of clerk to the governors at Park Lane College, in Leeds – an institution headed by Terry Ashurst's old loyal deputy from Doncaster, Tony Longworth.

With the departure last month of Park Lane's head of personnel, Linda Brown, there was clearly only one possible choice to fill the breach… Nina Ashurst.

Meanwhile, David Fell, former head of Donny's business school, has taken up the role of vice principal at Park Lane. The take-over is almost complete.

7 Reasons Why Teacher's Find Us Top Class.

T4Teachers advertisement

I-SPY

Transport company, Hamburg

Submitted by Viola Braunburg.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

FOCUS ON THE FT

RED FACES and even redder balance sheets at the pink 'un.

Pearson chief executive Dame Marjorie Scardino admitted on Monday that revenues at the once-mighty *Financial Times* fell by 19 per cent in the past year, profits are down by more than 90 per cent, and in the latter half of the year it was actually operating at a loss. Oh, and one of the *FT*'s most senior hacks, Julia Cuthbertson, has been suspended after conducting a séance at which she attempted to contact the spirit of the *FT*'s former deputy editor, Peter Martin, who died last year.

Even if he were alive, Martin might struggle to put his old newspaper back on the straight and narrow. Despite an understandable reluctance to speak ill of the dead, everybody there knows that one reason for the disastrous slide in Pearson shares – from £26 in 2000 to £4.80 now – is the total hash he made of the squillions poured into ft.com (although most blame should of course be attached to Dame Marje for her crazed faith in an electronic future).

Julia Cuthbertson's séance was held at the office and filmed for a cable TV documentary which made copious references to the *FT*: hence her suspension for "bringing the paper into disrepute". What puzzles colleagues is why this former sub-editor wasn't sacked years ago.

In 1995, when she was news editor, the *Eye* revealed that she had been sending faxes to a chum with hot inside tips on a possible takeover bid for Costain and its likely effect on the share price. This occurred just after the then editor, Richard "Safe Hands" Lambert, had warned hacks that they shouldn't profit from financial information they received in advance of general publication: "Nor should they pass such information to others. Anyone who, prior to publication, uses information gained as a result of their position on the *FT* staff… will be regarded as guilty of misconduct and liable to summary dismissal".

Cuthbertson's faxes were peppered with phrases such as "I hope you make the right move at the right moment… sit tight… it would be nice to be extremely rich… I expect dinner somewhere terribly flash from the millions you make." Yet her excuse, incredibly, was that she was merely helping a fellow-hack with a story. Even more incredibly, Lambert accepted it, insisting that she "has my complete confidence".

Cuthbertson later became a notably dire editor of the *FT*'s Weekend section, where she published features galore by her new young lover Justin Marozzi (soon to become husband number four). Last October she was eased out of the job but nevertheless held on to her £100,000-plus salary with the new title of feature writer, contracted to write at least 10 pieces a year – a rate that would keep five stringers in the field in far-flung places.

Even now that she's suspended, Cuthbertson is still on full pay. Following the latest financial results even the *FT* may be forced to recognise that this gorgeous pouting table-tapper is a luxury they can't afford.

'Fayed's chopper drives us crazy'

Ealing & Acton Gazette

TV

Boys And Girls (Channel 4)

IT'S A well-known rule of US politics that, consciously or not, presidents tend to choose vice-presidents who make the top man look better: thick Quayle, dull Gore, sick Cheney, etc.

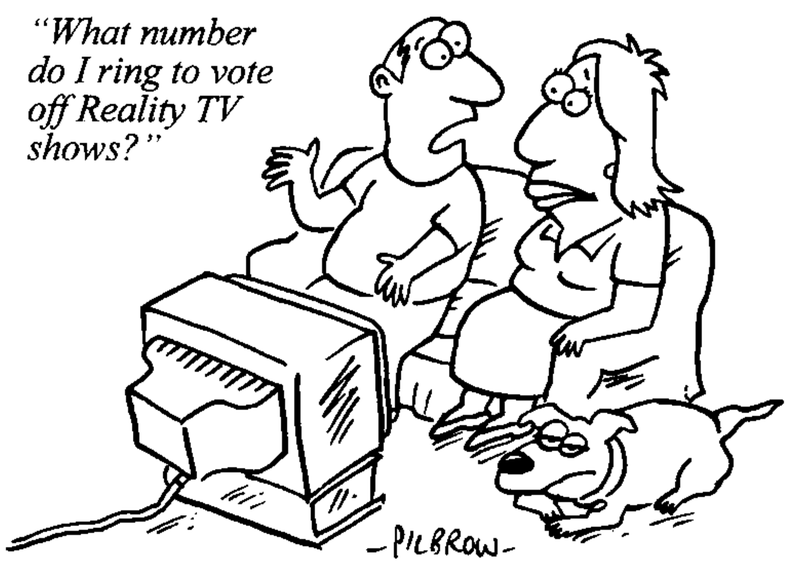
It's looking as if this also applies to television presenters who become producers. Since Chris Evans got the money and the girl and took himself off screen, he's produced two projects with proxy hosts. Despite – or possibly because of – Evans's claim that Chris Moyles was "the new me", the obese DJ was chased off the screen quicker than lesbian protestors ambushing the evening news.

The latest Ginger stand-in is Vernon Kay, who is either a parody of Austin Powers or the model for him. He presides over the flagship of Evans's new career as a TV producer. Boys And Girls is a live game-show, initially running for 12 weeks, which tries to persuade the vital advertiser-friendly 18-34s not to go out on a Saturday night to get bladdered and shagged but stay in and watch this instead.

Whatever you may think about The Weakest Link and Big Brother, they were at least original formats but Boys And Girls follows that all too common formula these days of mixing up lots of existing ideas in the hope of giving the impression of a new one.

The first decision in any game show is what the teams will be. Weakest Link and its many imitators have run through so many permutations that the only question-contest not yet staged by television is probably Paedophiles v Social Workers. So, gambling that convention is the new originality, Ginger has gone back to basics. The teams are separated by gender, although there's clearly a hope that quantity might distract us from the lack of quality in this format. The idea is that 100 girls compete against 100 boys for a prize of £100,000.

Decision two is the questions. Here, praying that banality might be the new radicalism, the series has ripped off Mr and Mrs. The lads and lasses have to anticipate the answer that the other side will give to such post-Loaded questions as: "Boys, you can only wash one body-part before a date. Would it be a) teeth or b) genitals?" Or, for the ladies: "If you had to part with your mobile phone or your make-up, which would it be?"



The third choice in a game-show is how the winners are decided. Simple addition of the scores is so 1980s. Under the rules of the new television cruelty, there has to be a twist in which either contestants or viewers can apply their prejudices or humiliate a fellow human being.

Boys And Girls does this by asking studio audience and viewers to vote on the looks of those taking part. The phrasing of this question, "Babe or minger?" has the feel, as does much of the show, of a middle-aged person trying to appear younger.

The one new twist that Boys And Girls brings to any of this is that, in addition to the winner of the rude beauty contest, other finalists are simply selected at random. This is clearly intended to feel deeply post-post-modern and 2003. It may also be autobiographical because Chris Evans always felt like a pretty random celebrity.

There must have been a moment round at the production company when they convinced themselves that, after humiliation game-shows, the next big thing was randomly selected winners. It removes the entire point of a competition but, hey, perhaps pointlessness is the new meaning.

The final choice a game-show makes is the prize. The six figure sum is in line with the post-Millionaire TV greed culture, but a variation is that the victor has to spend their winnings in a week – stressing that this is a young show, which disses ISAs and Tessas and all that grey-beard saving scheme stuff – and, get this, has to live in a house wired up with cameras while doing so. In other words, the format ends up copying Big Brother, which just happens to have been one of C4's few recent hits.

Vernon Kay is then required to keep the contestants and audience at the pitch of bladdered or mock-bladdered excitement in the "zoo" style which Evans first copied from American television in the early 1990s. And, like Chris Moyles before him, Kay seems designed to make the viewers think that Chris Evans himself wasn't so bad and should maybe be back on screen. But, in that, as in everything else, the show fails.

Anyway, the audience at whom this dross is aimed clearly does have better things to do on a Saturday night. The first outing of Girls and Boys pulled in only a million viewers, a somewhat less-than-adequate return on the programme's staggering £500,000 per-episode budget.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

SKY NEWS asks David Chater in Baghdad on 27 February about reports that Saddam's Republican Guard is marching south: "David, what do you know about troop movements in Iraq?"

"We know nothing about it in Baghdad – and even if we did, it would be impossible for us to tell you, given the nature of things here," responds our newshound.

MEDIA NEWS

THE TEAM behind MTV's *Jackass* proudly boast of being "total idiots". Their political pronouncements during a tour of Europe to promote their new film suggest this is very much the case.

Appearing at Dublin's Vicar Street bar on 23 February, team member Steve-O was encouraged by MTV publicists to set fire to his hair, staple his scrotum to his leg and attempt to hang himself from a light fitting. His most spectacular moment, however, came when, like every true American after a few pints of Guinness, he discovered himself to be Irish, and led the crowd in a rendition of traditional Sinn Fein anthem, "Fuck the Queen". He then proceeded to strip naked and wipe his bum with a pair of Union Jack underpants.

Three days later the MTV team arranged another photocall, where Steve-O leapt from Tower Bridge, wearing the same pair of Union Jack pants, to show the team's appreciation for "London, England".

"THE SERVICE must deliver a mixed schedule of programmes embracing drama, entertainment, current affairs, education, music, the arts, sciences, international issues..." These are some of the conditions set out in BBC3's licence to broadcast, by culture secretary Tessa Jowell.

And here's BBC3's schedule for 28 February: *Liquid News* (celebs), *Liquid Profiles* (celebs), *The News Show* (NB: not "news" but a news "show" which, incidentally, attracts a mere 6,000 viewers), *Robbie Williams: What A Performance* (a celeb speaks), *EastEnders Revealed* (celebs "behind the scenes"), *Body Hits* (a "documentary" about why drugs are bad for you), more *EastEnders*, *Celebdaq* (yet more celebs), *Fatboy Slim: Musical Hooligan* (another "behind the scenes" celeb), *Johnny Vaughan Tonight* (interviews with celebs) – all of this repeated until 4am, when something called *Party 'til You Die* comes on.

PS: BBC3 cost £97m.

CELEB-FIXATION isn't confined to desperate digital channels. Once again, BBC1's increasingly news-free six o'clock bulletin has aired a generous peak time plug in exchange for a celebrity interview.

To secure the briefest of chats with Jennifer Lopez – in London to promote a pisspoor film – the Beeb's "Entertainment and Leisure Correspondent", Robert Nisbet gave viewers a fulsome preview of her other money-spinning ventures: "J-Lo also markets her own clothes lines and now has her own perfume", he fawned over pix of same.

"But even in this celeb-obsessed culture", he mused, "is J-Lo in danger of over exposure?" – a question Nisbet nevertheless left unanswered in either his live two-way … or his interview… or his video package.

DOCUMENTARY makers at Granada hit on a simple if insensitive way of tracking down anyone who might have known murdered student Rachel McLean.

Researcher Tom Whitrow used the website Friends Reunited to send an e-mail to contemporaries of the 19-year-old Oxford student, who was killed in 1991.

"Although you may not have known her personally," wrote Whitrow, "you might be able to give us some feeling of the atmosphere during the investigation."

Friends Reunited – who regularly allow TV companies (including Granada) to place ads on the site to find contacts for documentaries – said they had not been approached for permission in this case and have now barred Whitrow from the site.

"I'm going to be late, I'm having a bad nose hair day"

"PAUL is a valued senior manager in BBC current affairs and his professionalism is widely acknowledged," says a BBC spokeswoman of Paul Woolwich, now executive producer of *Kenyon Confronts*. These are generous words, especially since Woolwich has just emerged severely tainted from a wrongful dismissal case against his old employers, Twenty Twenty Productions.

Far from bagging a fat cheque, Woolwich found himself accused in court of "systematic bullying", particularly against junior staff. "I am satisfied," Sir Donald Rattee concluded, "that he overstepped the line between proper demands of high standards of performance, and unreasonably and inappropriately harsh, intemperate and humiliating criticism on the other, which can indeed and did in Mr Woolwich's case on occasions did amount to bullying of others." Rattee dismissed Woolwich's claim and ordered him to pay the (hefty) costs.

Evidence accepted by the judge featured "a number of incidents of bullying", including a delightful moment when Woolwich shook a video tape in the face of a woman not working hard enough, shrieking "this is what feeds your daughter". Staff took days off sick rather than face another day with their domineering boss.

Since Woolwich is now a current affairs executive at the BBC, the corporation should be slightly alarmed by Sir Donald Rattee's comments on his attitude to facts. "I have to say I did not find him a reliable witness on matters at issue in this case," the judge observed. "I do think that he has – and demonstrated in his evidence – a considerable propensity for deluding himself into thinking, and then seeking to persuade others, that things were said and done which suit the case he is seeking to put forward."

The BBC may be further embarrassed by the fact that it has just launched an initiative to stamp out "endemic bullying within the corporation".

PS *Eye* readers may have a slight sense of *déjà lu*. As long ago as January 1990 (*Eye* 732) we noted that staff were fleeing from the Channel 4 programme *Hard News*. "Why the exodus?" we asked. "Could it be that they are all heartily fed up with editor Paul Woolwich?"

DUMB BRITAIN

BBC GMR, Phil Wood Show

Wood: What "K" could be described as the Islamic Bible?
Contestant: Er...
Wood: It's got two syllables... Kor...
Contestant: Blimey?
Wood: Ha ha ha ha no. The past participle of run...
Contestant: *(Silence)*
Wood: OK, try it another way. Today I run, yesterday I...
Contestant: Walked?

Fifteen-To-One, C4

William G Stewart: Which cathedral town on the river Severn shares its name with the sauce used in a Bloody Mary?
Contestant: Tomato.

AD NAUSEAM

***EYE* 1063 reported on the mêlée of conflicting opinions over whether or not the advertising industry is in terminal decline. Our conclusion then was that no one had the slightest clue.**

They still don't. WPP's Martin "Shorty" Sorrell (a name acquired when an account man at one of his agencies made a typo on an email signed "see you shortly") has always been at the vanguard of this soothsaying, and his most recent pronouncements have been as useless as ever. Aside from predicting "a bath-shaped recovery… although the bath does seem to have deep corrugations", Sorrell warned recently that "worldwide economic conditions are likely to remain difficult in 2003, particularly given the uncertainty created by the prospect of a war in Iraq".

Funny that, as according to Martin Bowley, chief executive of ITV's ad sales house, a war could be just the fillip the industry needs – "The war is supposed to be in March, and campaigns have been booked in full knowledge of that happening. There needs to be a point in time when the ongoing recession ends. And the end of the war is as good as any."

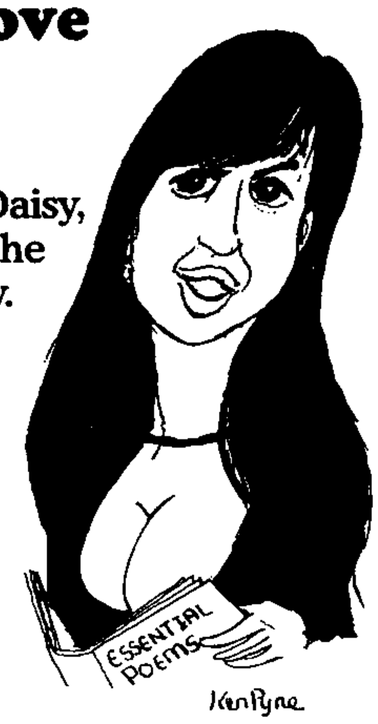
But does it even need a fillip at all? Not according to market research gurus Nielsen Media Research, who last week announced that the adspend of the top 100 UK advertisers had increased by a record 11.8 per cent in 2002. Hurrah! Business must be booming in adland! Not so – just six days earlier figures were published showing that almost half of the top 20 UK advertising agencies billings had *declined* in 2002. The figures came from… Nielsen Media Research.

Essential Presenters to Fall in Love With

There was a young
woman called Daisy,
Who thought that the
public were lazy.

To make verse a
bestseller,
She came on like
Nigella.

And flashed her
embonpoint
like crazy.



STAYING with the recession, imaginary or otherwise, we return to the fortunes (*sic*) of Garry Lace, the new chief executive at Grey Advertising (*Eye* 1073). Several newly-unemployed admen have been quick to point out that Lace is the current chairman of NABS, the industry charity that looks after those who have fallen on hard times. These now include the 48 people (20 per cent of the Grey workforce) sacked by Lace.

As it happens, one of NABS' new fundraising initiatives this year is a "May Day Pay Day", inviting everyone in the marketing communications industry to give 1/365th of their salary to NABS. With Lace's salary of £800,000, no doubt Lace will be sending NABS a cheque for £2,191 come 6 May. That's £45 each for those he laid off.

OUT OF CON-TEXT

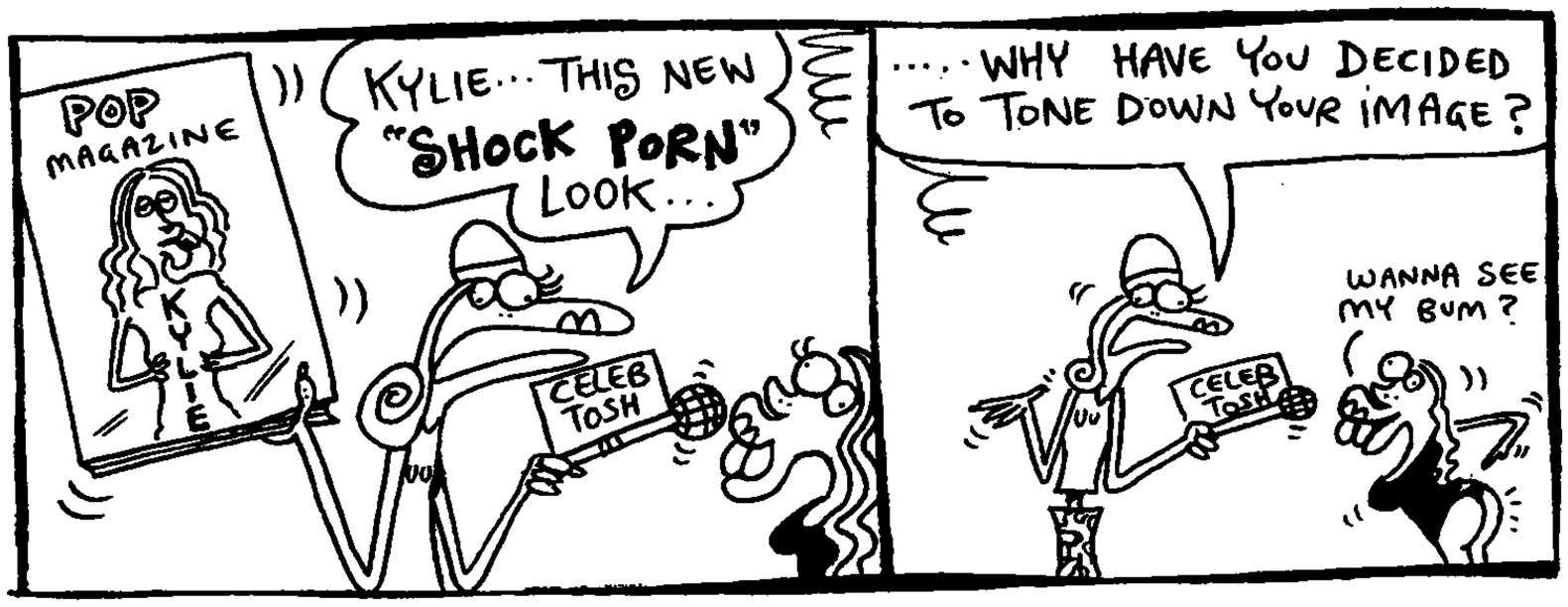
"'AT LAST, a musical that rivals *Mamma Mia!' — The Guardian*" is the quote emblazoned across posters and press ads for *Our House*, the musical based on the songs of Madness which is running in the West End.

Curiously, no one at the *Guardian* can recall such a phrase ever appearing in the paper – certainly, it wasn't the opinion of reviewer Michael Billington, who called the show "hard work to watch" with tunes of "raucous sameness", and accused those behind it of "capricious folly".

The closest match that the *Guardian*'s readers editor can find in the paper's archive came from the standfirst accompanying an interview with *Our House*'s producer: "Peter Bennett-Jones believes his play *Our House*, which opens on Monday, has the potential to be as internationally successful as the Abba musical *Mamma Mia*". But then he would say that, wouldn't he?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOWN ON THE FARM

BEN GILL, the NFU president, chose the union's recent annual conference to proclaim "there is no point whatsoever in farmers looking back at the suffering and problems of recent years and getting obsessed with petty irrelevancies" (such as how useless their president has been at his job). "We have to stop whinging about the past," he told his fast diminishing number of members. "The farming industry cannot get back to where it was before" (presumably he means before he was elected to office) and "we must use the experience of foot and mouth to our best advantage".

One lesson most farmers learned from that experience, of course, was that Gill's own contribution to the debacle was worse than useless, consisting of little more than prating about the evils of vaccination and endorsing the government's obscene policy of killing nine million healthy animals.

One thing, however, you can always be sure of when Gill is holding forth on the problems of British farming is that you will never hear much criticism of the EU's common agricultural policy (although of course, like everyone else except the French, he would like to see it "reformed"). Naturally he loves the £2bn a year in subsidies which flow from Brussels (although he never points out to his members that, in order to get that £2bn back from Brussels, UK taxpayers must send £5bn to Brussels in the first place, much of which then goes to subsidising our farmers' competitors). So the top priority, he said, was to focus on "how we can lower costs to the farmer", the worst problem being the "astronomic" cost of regulations. What he was too tactful to point out, since his fellow-speakers included Franz Fischler, the Austrian in charge of the CAP, is that churning out all those regulations is precisely the purpose of Herr Fischler's officials in Brussels, so that they can then be enforced with unique zeal by Fischler's branch office in Whitehall, under the inspiring leadership of his local branch manager, Margaret Beckett. When Gill went on to point out that farm incomes in the UK have fallen 30 per cent in the last six years while everywhere else in the EU they have risen, he was again too tactful to point out why. It is because the UK government applies for an absolute minimum of the subsidies available from Brussels because, under the rules of Mrs Thatcher's rebate, British taxpayers must shell out a higher contribution to subsidies than anyone else, while other EU governments grab all they can get. Our farmers are thus expected to compete with EU counterparts whose produce is cheaper because it is more highly subsidised, not least thanks to those generous UK taxpayers. It is hardly surprising that our supermarkets prefer to buy from France and Ireland. You can't expect Mr Gill to explain this, because his members might wonder why we belong to such a silly club anyway.

'Muckspreader'

THE BIG IDEA in farm commissioner Fischler's proposals for the mid-term review of the CAP is the "decoupling" of aid from production. On the face of it, the radical plan, whereby each farm will receive a single annual payment based on previous subsidies, has plenty to recommend it. At a stroke much of the staggering bureaucracy and administrative cost of agriculture would vanish, and without the undeniable distortions of farming for subsidies, producers could respond better to real economics: markets and the actual capabilities of each farm.

Scratch and sniff the plan, however, and you get a strongly fishy smell. This, less than a year from now, is the very end of support for farming, because no actual farming is required. It is, instead, a subsidy for landowning. Since on many farms the "entitlement" will be close to £100 per acre, far more than either average rents or average profits, the game must be up. Owner-occupier farmers will cease farming, collect their cheques, perhaps get a job, and allow anyone who wishes to farm the land for nothing, although only large-scale operations with a secure subsidy base of their own could possibly farm extra land without subsidy. Tenants on term tenancies — and half of all UK farmers rent all or part of their land — will be ruined. Landowners will see no point in letting land for less than its entitlement, because they too can pocket the subsidy, lend the land to whoever wants to make a few pennies, or just use it for sport and recreation. The more you look, the worse it gets. The land market itself will be further distorted, with investors eyeing up the yield from the entitlement irrespective of farming prospects.

Oh, and European food production is expected to decline dramatically, leaving us hopelessly dependent on imports.

This idea is so bad that Margaret Beckett is backing it, but luckily it looks as if it will be defeated by the majority of EU countries.

'Gumboot'

SIGNAL FAILURES

The F*** Controller

THERE ARE two ways the "strategic" rail authority could shake off its poor image. One would be by improving train services significantly. The SRA has therefore resorted to plan B – trying to silence its critics.

Richard Bowker wields such great power as SRA chairman *and* chief executive – surrounded by sycophants in key posts and a predominantly weak board – that exasperated rail managers can't openly challenge or criticise his decisions. Instead they're resorting to off-the-record media briefings. So Bowker created the £85,000 post of media director and recruited a former political spindoctor, Ceri Evans, to savage anyone who spreads heresy against the holy trinity of chairman, chief executive and strategy director (Bowker, Bowker and Bowker's pal Jim Steer).

Sadly for Bowker, Britain still has a free press. As rail chaos deepens, negative stories multiply and the SRA makes more enemies with its nasty responses.

Rail Professional magazine felt the force of Evans' foul tongue after airing the concerns of Tony Berkeley, chairman of the Rail freight group. Even Bowker must see, through the fog of his self-righteousness, that slashing freight money while giving huge bailouts to passenger operators such as Virgin and Connex gives freight firms cause for alarm. But Evans left the following message on the magazine's answerphone: "I am *so* fed up with this Tony Berkeley *shite* that you've printed this month. I... I... honestly... I feel *fucking* nauseous, and I really want you to call me back about it. He is a *fucking* dilettante and I *really* want you to call me back about it. It's *outrageous* and I feel really upset. Bye."

The SRA also sacked its freight director, Berkeley's wife, after the article (*Eye* 1073) and cancelled an interview with Bowker - it's now "cautious" about *Rail Professional*. Bowker was due to present the magazine's industry awards but after it described his outfit as the "Stalinist" rail authority he remembered an unmissable meeting in Scotland.

The SRA thinks the way to win debates is to sulk. It refuses to speak to journalists working on negative stories, such as Radio 4's two-parter comparing the Beeching cuts of 1963 with the Bowching cuts of 2003. One local Beeb reporter was told abysmal punctuality statistics for his patch were nothing to do with the SRA.

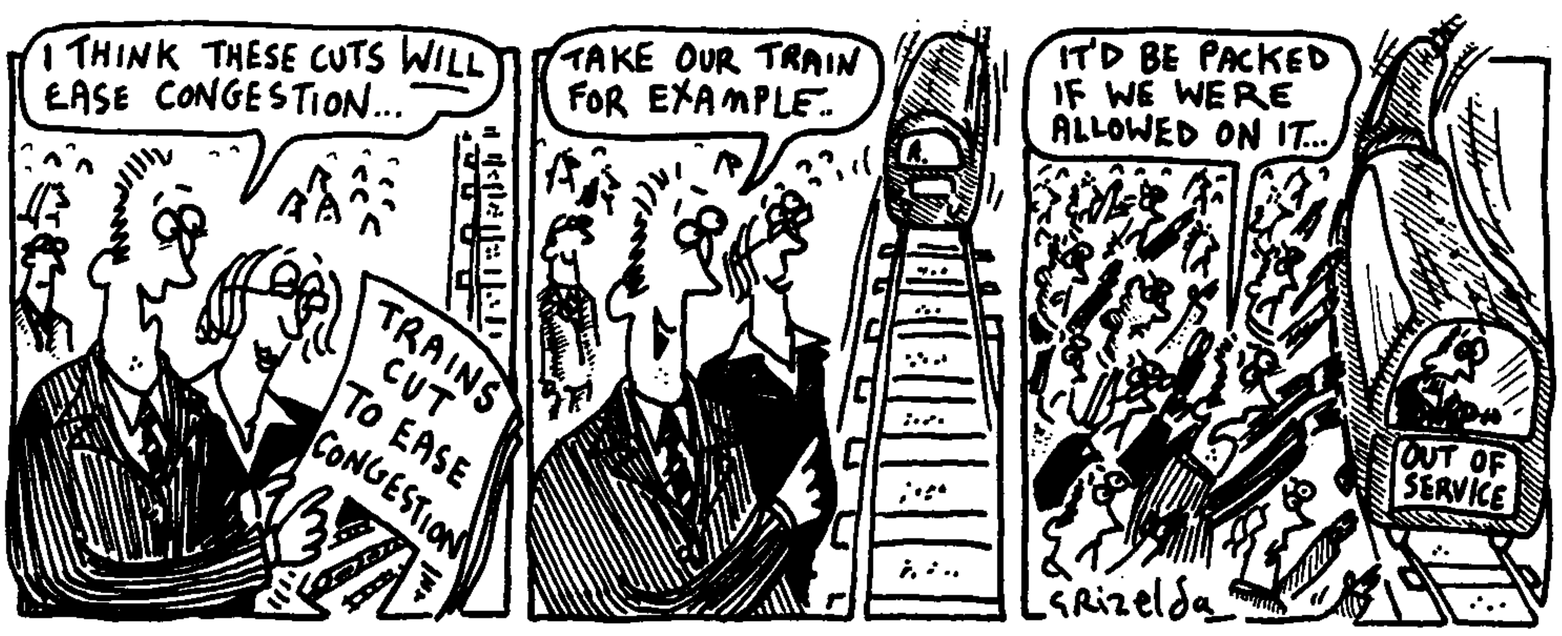
It also hides awkward information. Last month's press release about a franchise extension for the dire Arriva Trains Northern omitted the key fact – the £230m subsidy for just 11 months. The 81 extra service cuts revealed last week were almost invisible in the SRA's press releases: news of less frequent Cardiff-Birmingham trains came under the heading "Cardiff gets fast, more frequent (*sic*) Birmingham trains", and Gloucester-Birmingham cuts under "Gloucester set to become major regional rail hub".

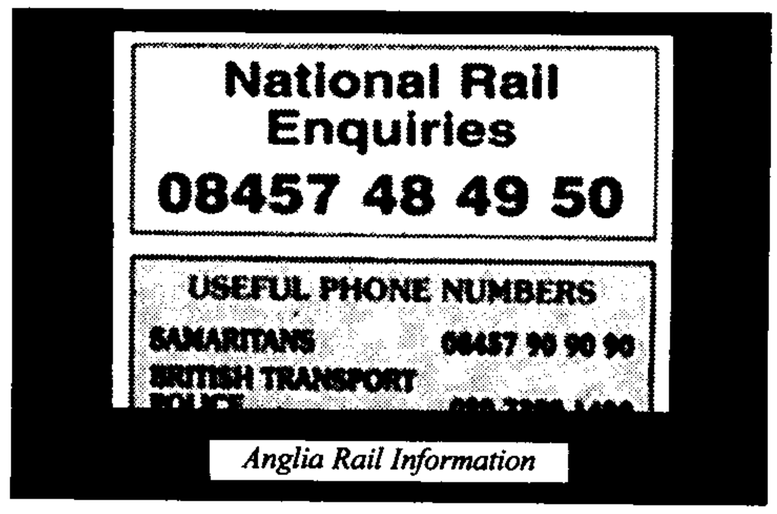
The SRA prefers to issue information like "Wolmarballs", sent to favoured hacks last month. On SRA headed paper, it aimed to punish transport writer Christian Wolmar for writing in *Rail* magazine: "Bowker has caused lasting damage."

"Our experiences seem to be part of a larger, emerging picture," says Andrew Goodman of *Rail Professional*. "One in which all power is concentrated around The Leader and opposition is steamrollered; in which dissenting voices are silenced, and bullying tactics are used to try to force the media to toe the party line."

Under Bowching, the SRA has also tried to muzzle passenger watchdogs – which are financed via the SRA but must officially "remain clearly independent" of it (*Eye* 1063). The SRA has given so many dressings down that questions have been asked in the Commons about Evans' relationship to the watchdogs. When Don Foster MP wanted correspondence between the SRA and the watchdogs placed in the Commons library, he was told the SRA would contact him "about the information he seeks". Nearly a month later the SRA has yet to get in touch.

'Dr B. Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
I THINK THESE CUTS WILL EASE CONGESTION...
TRAINS CUT TO EASE CONGESTION
TAKE OUR TRAIN FOR EXAMPLE..
IT'D BE PACKED IF WE WERE ALLOWED ON IT...
OUT OF SERVICE
Grizelda



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

HOUNDING THE FOX

PUBLICAN Geoff Monks saw his £1m business destroyed and his health ruined – and it all began when an inexperienced waitress served a customer the wrong bottle of wine.

In May 1998 Monks was the owner of a successful pub and restaurant in Northamptonshire, the Snooty Fox, at Lowick, near Kettering. On the evening of Thursday 28th prominent local solicitor Jenny Lawrence dined there with a friend. Lawrence is known locally as a flamboyant character with an overbearing manner. She had, in March that year, lost an industrial tribunal case at which she was found to have bullied and unfairly sacked two secretaries. When Lawrence was presented with the bill for her meal at the Snooty Fox she complained that she had been charged for the expensive bottle of white Burgundy she had ordered, but had actually been served the cheaper house white. Monks was summoned to her table, where he apologised for the mistake and corrected the bill. He then remarked that the error didn't seem to have prevented Lawrence polishing off the bottle. Big mistake. Lawrence, according to Monks, then "flipped her lid" and became abusive to him and his staff. So Monks told Lawrence that she was, in the time honoured fashion, barred.

Nasty but common

The following week Lawrence visited her doctor, complaining that she was suffering from food poisoning. Tests revealed the presence of Campylobacter, a nasty but common food poisoning bug, in her gut. Lawrence then complained to Conservative-controlled East Northants district council's environmental health department that she must have been made ill by chicken liver pate she had eaten at the Snooty Fox. Curiously, no other diner who had consumed pate from the same block was ill. As Campylobacter can take up to 11 days to incubate, the pub meal was only one of many opportunities for Lawrence to have picked up her infection. A barbecue she hosted at her home was another possibility.

On 23 June ENDC environmental health officers Sarah Pateman and Philip Morton, plus a female student on work experience, J Smith, visited the Snooty Fox to make a hygiene inspection and take food samples. On 24 June Morton told Monks he would be giving the pub a clean bill of health. But more than two months later Monks received a letter telling him he was to be prosecuted. He immediately went to the council offices to see principal EHO David Hartley, who refused to tell him what the food safety problem was, saying he would "find out when the summonses arrived". Monks was also refused a copy of the inspection report and of the scientific analysis of the samples taken. This was all in clear breach of food standards agency guidelines, which stress that caterers should be given opportunities to put things right before legal action is taken.

Nearly a year after the raid six summonses arrived, the most important relating to "mouldy" ham and pork allegedly found at the Snooty Fox. No mention of chicken liver pate. Geoff Monks became the first caterer in the council's area ever to be prosecuted for food safety offences, despite there being some 900 food premises in the area, of which 98 were found to have committed infringements in 1999 alone. But all the others were given the opportunity to clean up their act without being prosecuted.

Mould story

When the case came in front of Kettering magistrates on 25 October 1999, the council presented a shoddy case, full of holes. No scientific evidence of contaminated food was produced. The council admitted having thrown away the samples it had taken, without having made them available to independent experts. The two environmental health officers gave contradictory evidence – one said the mould on the ham was in large green colonies, the other said it consisted of small black specks. Both agreed the mouldy ham was on the bone. But Monks had never used on the bone ham in his kitchen. Around 70 photographs had been taken – but none showed mouldy ham or pork. Nevertheless the magistrates accepted the word of the EHOs and Monks, despite having an unblemished 20-year record in catering, was ordered to pay a staggering total of £27,500 in fines and costs – by far the largest penalty ever against a sole trader for food safety offences in the UK.

In October 2000 Monks's fine was reduced to £20,000 on appeal. The conviction, however, was upheld. A private investigator working for Monks subsequently discovered that the council's principal investigator in the case, Morton, had changed his version of what had happened in the raid. His notes taken at the time indicated that many samples were taken by "J Smith" — the student. But under the food safety act samples must only be taken by an "authorised officer" of the council, which Smith was not – so samples taken by her could not be used in evidence. The council got round this inconvenient fact by airbrushing Smith out of Morton's and Pateman's statements. The court was told that they had taken all the samples themselves.

Monks complained to the district auditor, who conducted an investigation, the results of which have never been made public. Shortly afterwards, however, the chief executive of the council, Roger Heath, whose decision it had been to prosecute Monks, took early retirement with an undisclosed payoff, which was enhanced by having his pensionable service revised from the 13 years he had actually served to 40. Heath was soon followed out the door by director of environmental health Terry Wilcock, principal EHO David Hartley and senior EHO Philip Morton.

Mickey Mouse

Before the clearout, however, they prosecuted Monks again – this time because a mouse had been seen at another country pub he owned, the Samuel Pepys. The local magistrates handed down another record fine — £12,500 – making it possibly the most costly mouse in history. A third prosecution against Monks is pending over some carrot peelings and a cracked window pane in a shed used to house chest freezers at his third pub, the Vane Arms, which like the Pepys has since closed. The window pane in question had been cracked for 17 years and had never attracted the attention of environmental health officers before. Monks, who now suffers from heart problems and has seen his surviving pub, the Snooty Fox, go from a highly profitable business to one that barely breaks even since the case, hopes that the forthcoming Pepys appeal, with new evidence at his disposal, may finally give him the opportunity to reverse this bizarre miscarriage of justice.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

RHODRI WILLIAMS, chair of the Welsh Language Board (WLB), and Welsh education minister Jane Davidson have some awkward questions to answer about £4m of public cash intended to fund a music training centre for young people in the deprived South Wales valleys.

The cash was granted by Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) to private television and media company Avanti in March last year. The money was supposed to bankroll an ambitious project – The Pop Factory Café – to provide training in media and music. To date, no training has been given and the "café" remains a disused supermarket.

In February the ELWa, concerned about the delay, asked for their money back. Avanti have handed back £1.6m of the cash, saying the rest has already been spent on preparation for the project. ELWa have agreed to re-release the £1.6m only in return for seeing some progress towards completion.

Plaid Cymru are calling for the resignation of Welsh education minister Jane Davidson, because the upfront granting of £4m broke Welsh Assembly accounting rules. Williams's role is just as questionable. As well as chairing the WLB quango he is a director of Avanti, with special responsibility for "training schemes for local people in the Rhondda".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

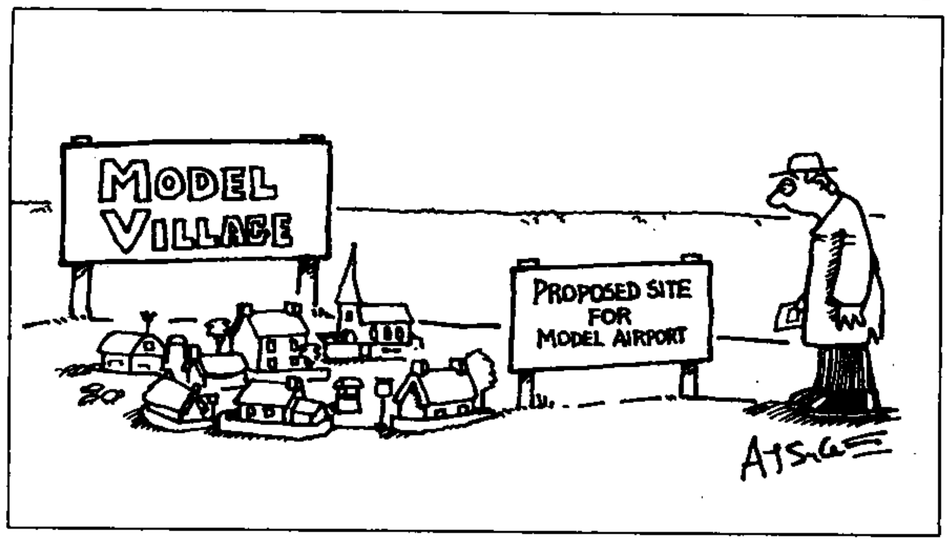
WELL, GIDEON, I CAN NOW REVEAL YOUR BIRTHDAY TREAT. WE'RE GOING TO THE ZOO!
GREAT! I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE LIONS, TIGERS, ELEPHANTS!
ZOO
OH WE'RE NOT GOING IN
END ANIMAL OPPRESSION NOW!!!
FREE THE OTTERS
EMANCIPATION FOR THE CRUSTACEAN

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE WEIGHT of history is a load that Southend Borough Council is disinclined to bear. As I reported in *Eye* 1051, the mediaeval church of St Laurence at Eastwood in Essex finds itself in the way of Southend Airport's plans for expansion.

So, naturally, it is the church that must go. The Civil Aviation Authority insists that a safety area should extend to 240 metres either side of the runway. This would encompass a number of old houses and a road — and poor old St Laurence's. The airport's first response was to propose moving the church. It is unlikely that much of the original fragile ancient fabric would remain after such a brutal and difficult operation.

But Southend Airport has now applied for listed building consent for the total *demolition* of St Laurence's Church, to be followed by compulsory purchase of the inconveniently sited properties it does not already own. These days, the demolition of a Grade I listed building is unheard of, but as Southend Borough Council owns the airport, the local authority is unlikely to turn this application down. It will then be left to English Heritage to object and call for a public inquiry, especially as this is a case with wider implications.



Such an enquiry might consider the alternatives to demolishing (or moving) a mediaeval church (and destroying its churchyard), all of which Southend has already rejected on economic or practical grounds. These options include demolishing new houses and realigning (or burying) a railway line. St Laurence's could be left alone if the runway was realigned and a new Tesco supermarket demolished instead. But demolishing a supermarket, rather than a church, is unthinkable.

Southend's dubious requirements are not being considered in a wider context. The government's consultation paper on the future development of air transport in the UK considers Southend as a second tier airport but notes that if a big new airport is built at Cliffe on the Kent side of the Thames Estuary, Southend Airport would probably have to close. Southend retorts that even if a new airport is constructed at Cliffe it is unlikely to be fully operational before 2030; in other words, a mere quarter-century of commercial activity at an airfield which has only existed since 1915 is more important than the survival of an historic place of worship which has been on the site since at least the year 1100.

Southend bangs on about the importance of airport jobs, especially as this bit of Essex lies in the Thames Gateway – John Prescott's exciting vision of continuous urban sprawl along both sides of the river. But, granted this, it might be more sensible – and gladden Mr Prescott's heart more – if Southend Airport was closed and the runway was built on, making St Laurence's, Eastwood, the core of a new urban village.

But we should not forget an even bigger picture. The government assumes air travel will continue to grow — but will it? At present it is declining. Even without the threat of terrorism, is it desirable to have more and more gas-guzzling aircraft polluting both the skies and the exotic destinations to which they take mass tourism? Would air traffic expand if airlines had to pay tax on fuel, as do railway companies and motorists? With its childish obsession with encouraging air travel, Britain is no better than those African dictatorships whose rulers insist on running a national airline even while bankrupting their countries.

There is one last thing. We should never forget that marvel of British technology, that colossal and expensive white elephant, the Bristol Brabazon. In the late 1940s, two villages had to be bulldozed to extend the runway at Filton near Bristol to make it 2,450 metres long so that the huge Brabazon could lumber into the air. The monster airliner was, of course, eventually cancelled. If the present government tells us St Laurence's must go, perhaps we should regard its imperatives with caution and think in the longer term. In a civilised country, 1000 years of history is not to be trifled with.

NOW, some good news concerning aeroplanes. In Eye 1052 I discussed the threat to the former Royal Aircraft Establishment site at Farnborough, Hants, which Slough Estates, abetted by Rushmoor borough council, hopes to clear and turn into a business park regardless of its historical importance and interest. Well, the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport has just endorsed the recommendation that Building R52 of 1916, containing Britain's earliest wind tunnel, should be listed, and that other structures be upgraded – with Building Q121 of 1934-35 with its 24-foot diameter wind tunnel now at Grade I. And quite right too.

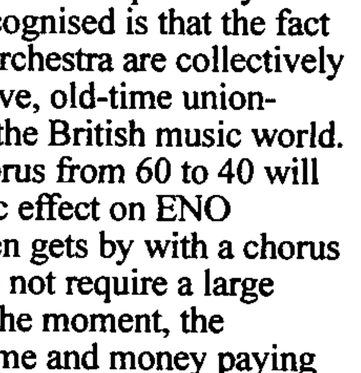
Slough Estates will have to think again.

'Piloti'

TOTO SWISS LOTTO LOSE

Switzerland **(Rod Bearden)**

MUSIC & MUSICIANS



THE SPECIOUS rhetoric and sheer misinformation being fed into the press reports of events at ENO is staggering. The minute Raymond Gubbay saw an opportunity for self-promotion and muscled in with comments about opera not being "a business like a bank, it has a heart and soul" – fantastic humbug from a hard-nosed impresario whose entire approach to opera is commercial – it was obvious that reason had taken a break from this debate.

And when the ENO chorus staged their emotionally manipulative strike last week, losing the company £350,000 and aggravating its financial problems, it was laughable to hear Equity officials loftily claiming the strike was to prevent "artistic quality being sacrificed to the accountants" and that the chorus's aim was "to have their work recognised by people who appear to hold their destiny in their hands".

The work of the ENO chorus is perfectly well recognised, but equally recognised is that the fact that the ENO chorus and orchestra are collectively the most difficult, aggressive, old-time union-driven bunch of people in the British music world. Reducing the full-time chorus from 60 to 40 will have no appreciable artistic effect on ENO productions. Covent Garden gets by with a chorus of just 43. Many operas do not require a large chorus – which is why, at the moment, the company spends a lot of time and money paying chorus members to do nothing. For the shows that do need more voices, exactly the same number of singers will be on stage as before. The only difference will be that 20 of them will be self-employed rather than staff.

The chorus work a basic 27 hours a week, the orchestra 21. Anything above that is handsomely-paid overtime, calculated in minimum four-hour blocks (even if the actual time worked is only a few minutes), with no carry-over from week to week – so overtime still kicks in if a musician didn't work his full hours the week before. Any performance taking place away from the Coliseum also comes in at a higher rate – which means that ENO's many performances at the Barbican while its home theatre is being refurbished are costing an absolute fortune.

IN THE meantime, however, the dirty war has been opened on another front, with a series of snitty anonymous emails and letters to music magazines which accuse Channel 4 and EMI (whose John Fraser was one of the judges) of engineering the success of blind competitor Denise Leigh in the *Operatunity* series in order to make good telly and manufacture a Russell Watson / Charlotte Church-style pop classic career for her.

"The venture is an insult to all those hard-working young professional artists who have devoted their time, energy, money and dedication to acquiring real performing skills, and who would give anything to have a fraction of the opportunity accorded to those mildly talented, but clearly amateur participants... the members of the ENO Chorus currently facing one redundancy are sick as parrots," read one anonymous email sent to journalists.

A fair comment – save for the fact that Leigh's voice, though untrained, was raw material that any conservatoire would be eager to snap up – and certainly as good, if not better, than the average voice in the ENO Chorus.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

DOING THE ROUNDS

Going...

NICK WOOD has resigned as chief executive of North Cumbria acute hospitals trust, which includes the country's flagship PFI hospital, the £87m Cumberland Infirmary.

Mr Wood jumped ship ahead of a Commission for Health Improvement report, which gave the trust the lowest possible score in four out of the seven clinical assessments. The trust also has "a considerable budget deficit" and pre-existing tensions between its two hospitals, the Infirmary and West Cumberland, have worsened since they merged in April 2001. This resulted in "conflict, lack of co-operation and poor cross-site working relationships".

Quite how this will be improved by another change of management remains to be seen. As ENT consultant Donald Clark put it: "Since 1990 I have worked for four different chief executives. This does very little to offer stability to staff who have already had to cope with moving to a new hospital and trust reorganisation and merger." His acting boss is now Peter Scott, previously the trust's third finance director since April 2001.

Also resigning is Jane Herbert, chief executive of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority (SHA), whose four-year stint as boss at South Manchester University hospitals NHS trust has come back to haunt her. An Audit Commission spot check found "evidence of deliberate misreporting of in-patient waiting times and waiting-list information" and a subsequent investigation commissioned by Greater Manchester SHA is to report shortly. As new Labour cranks up the pressure on hospital bosses to hit unrealistic access targets in time for the next election, expect more creative bean counting all round.

Moving...

RUTH HARRISON, chief executive of Worcester acute hospitals NHS trust is to oversee the merger of Stoke Mandeville and South Buckinghamshire NHS trusts.

Worcestershire has been through one of the UK's most acrimonious health mergers, with the downgrading of Kidderminster hospital ultimately leading to the loss of the once safe Labour seat of Wyre Forest. The new £96m PFI trust is now £7m in the red and so full that it closed its doors to admissions seven times in two months. Harrison has survived several calls for her resignation and two votes of no confidence from the trust's consultants. As one pathologist put it: "She was appointed to allow a dominant chairman (Michael O'Riordan) to force through a highly unpopular trust merger. Our sincerest condolences go to South Bucks."

Backtracking...

WHOEVER presided over the Kidderminster cutbacks would have been vilified on all sides, but CHI has ironically praised the trust management for its "largely successful" merger given the pressure from government to centralise services to larger hospitals, and downsize smaller ones in the face of fierce opposition from local NHS staff and patients.

Now the Department of Health appears to have ditched its politically hazardous "big is beautiful" policy and replaced it with "Keeping the NHS local: a new direction of travel". This reconfiguration document is full of waffle about "developing change with people, not for them" and "socially sustainable decision making" but there are only six bare paragraphs on the thorny issue of implementation.

Given the obligatory doctors' hours reductions of the European Working Time Directive, the wide variation in access to specialist treatment in the UK and the need for all hospitals to have sufficient workload for meaningful audit, it is difficult to see how many small maternity, paediatric and casualty departments can continue to function. The policy of centralising specialist services to fewer hospitals is correct, but failing because of poor leadership, lack of public consultation and prohibitively expensive PFI contracts that are swallowing up all the money and leading to downsizing decisions based on cost rather than safety. Doubtless "new" Labour will try to fudge the issue for as long as possible, and so minimise the number of "save our hospital" candidates at the next election.

M.D.

● **"THE AMOUNT [*sic*] of doctors suspended for long periods of time is good for neither the doctors nor the NHS," commented Health Secretary Alan Milburn at a Labour party dinner in November.**

He might perhaps therefore turn his attention to the case of Coventry-based heart specialist Dr Raj Mattu. Last week, a full year after Dr Mattu was first suspended from Walsgrave Hospital over bullying allegations, a panel decided that he should remain suspended while, er, they looked at the allegations some more.

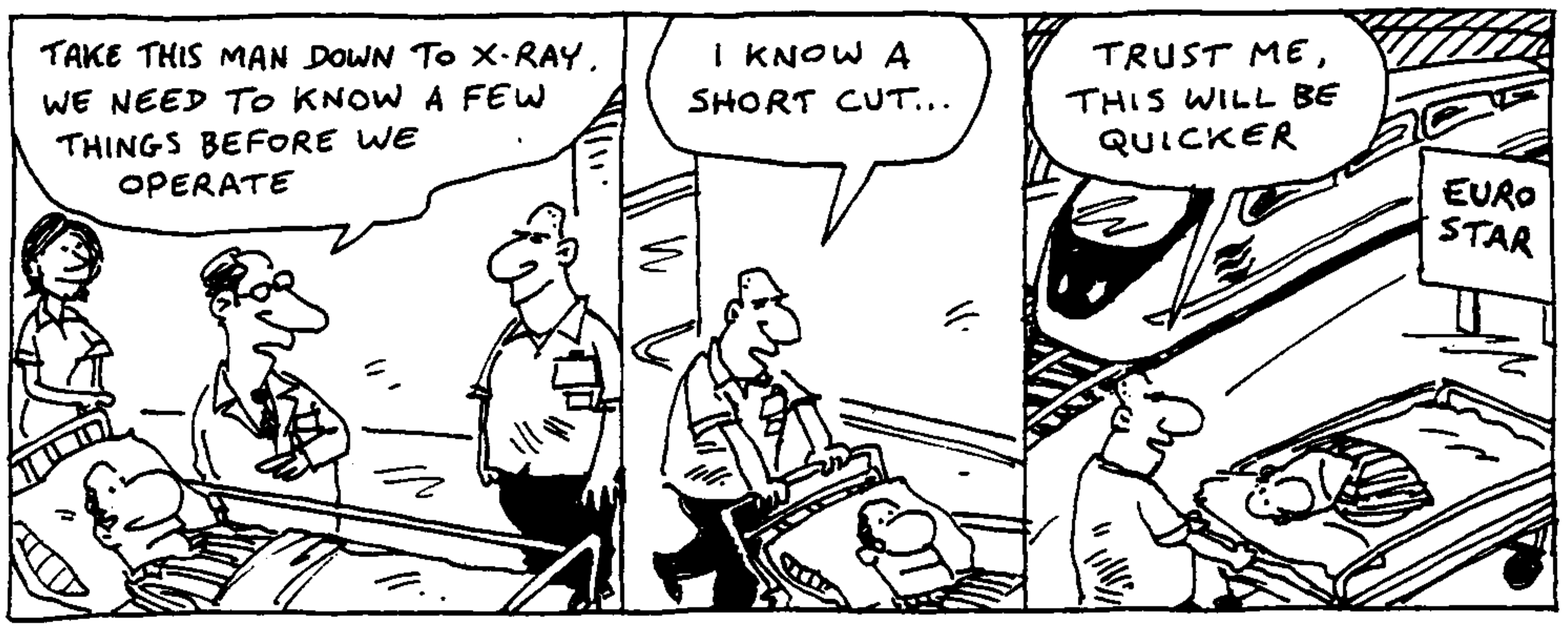
Meanwhile the people of Coventry are missing out on the skills of an experienced cardiologist, whose clinical abilities have never been in question.

Dr Mattu claims that the suspension is a stitch-up, following his open criticism of the hospital to the Commission for Health Improvement in September 2001. He pointed out that four-patient bays were regularly being used for five patients which left the bays under-equipped and therefore a threat to life. He said on TV that two patients had died thanks to the five-patient policy. The CHI deemed the practice unsafe and criticised the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust. Less than six months later he found himself barred from work. No date has yet been set for a formal disciplinary hearing.

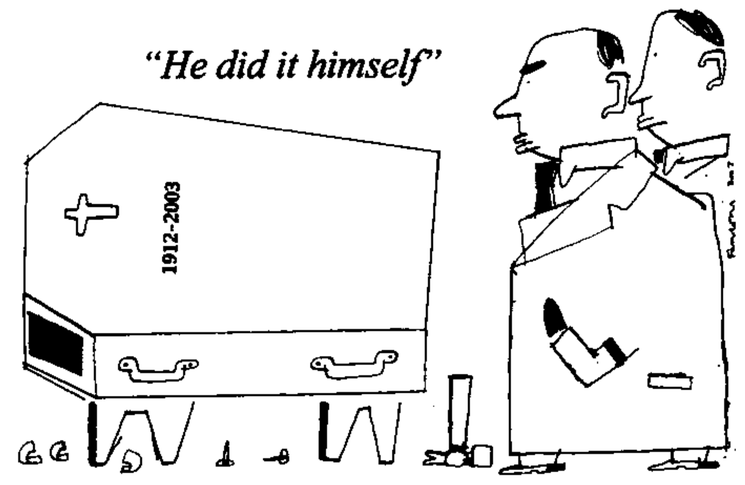
Mattu was suspended in February 2002, accused of bullying a junior colleague, and has been on paid leave ever since, despite a national shortage of heart specialists. He continues to run a free community heart health clinic. Thousands of supporters in Coventry have signed a petition calling for his reinstatement.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


TAKE THIS MAN DOWN TO X-RAY. WE NEED TO KNOW A FEW THINGS BEFORE WE OPERATE
I KNOW A SHORT CUT...
TRUST ME, THIS WILL BE QUICKER
EURO STAR

R.I.P. Barry Bucknell, Television's D.I.Y. Pioneer



UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

ACCORDING to BNFL, the UK's nuclear conglomerate that processes waste, builds reactors and still owns a handful of generating stations, the White Paper on energy released last week is to be "cautiously welcomed".

At first glance this is a puzzling reaction. The document contains no commitments to expand Britain's nuclear power industry, despite an over-optimistic BNFL spinning for months beforehand that there would be. According to wide-eyed environmentalists, this paper represents the "death knell" for nuclear power.

Actually BNFL shouldn't be too worried. The White Paper repeats the pledge to more than triple the amount of Britain's electricity generated by renewables by 2010, and "to aim" to have a whopping 20 per cent of all our electricity made by wind, tidal and so-on power by 2020. Considering the squillions of pounds of investment this would need (plus the sequestering of several Scottish islands on which to build the necessary windfarms – the only realistic green energy source at present) this aim is surely pie-in-the-sky. Leaving the door open for a nuclear comeback – the only cost-effective way of reducing CO_2 emissions in the short term. Unless, of course, clean, green workable fusion power can be developed in time. After all, this is "only 20 years" away – according to just about every account of the energy holy grail published in the last, er, 50 years.

"YES, we have no bananas!" The nation's sub-editors reached for the cliché-book when the *New Scientist* last month proclaimed that our favourite fruit was heading for extinction. A lack of genetic diversity plus the appearance of some nasty diseases would mean that by 2015 or thereabouts, the banana would be as rare as on a WW2 fruit stall.

In fact the chances of there being no bananas by 2013 are, essentially, zero. True, a series of nasty plant diseases threatens banana crops in various places around the world, but there is no suggestion of a banana Armageddon of the scale envisaged by *New Scientist*. "I couldn't decide whether this story was even meant to be serious," says Dr David Jones, an expert in plant diseases, who ridiculed the story. (To be fair to *NS*, they did print a letter from Dr Jones correcting the story, but by then the dailies had had their fun.)

The key here is that dread-phrase "within 10 years". When this comes attached to a science story (as a timescale for a cure for cancer/faster-than-light Star-Trek-style travel/a real slimming pill, etc), it should be treated with the same sort of caution that the phrase "sources close to the government" engenders in a lobby-hack fable. It could be true, in other words, but it most probably isn't.

MANY thanks to readers who have pointed out an error in this column last week. NTL's new broadband limits do indeed equate to 10,000 reasonable-quality pictures, not the "grainy thumbnails" I suggested. In these things, figures matter. Apologies.

NTL's revised download limits are still pisspoor, though…

'Boffin'

Pseuds Corner

Amid the wreckage of defeat lay a great fast bowler's shattered career. It was beyond repair or redemption and it had all the life and poignancy of a child's ragged teddy bear staring from the ruins of an earthquake.

STEPHEN BRENKLEY on South African cricketer Allan Donald
Independent

Jack Welch said to me the other night that he loved living at the top of the Trump Building because every time he looked out the window at night and saw the lights of Manhattan, "I felt I had the world by the ass".

TINA BROWN
Salon.com

Invisible bodies: Young women on display in clothing diaries.
Y MOREY & H FRITH, University of the West of England
Objectives: This paper explores the construction of young identities by means of clothing practices, and in particular, how these clothing practices influenced, and were influence by, the inhabiting of different spaces and locations by young people…
Conclusions: The construction of clothed identities by young women and the positioning of young women's subjectivities by discourses operating in the accounts, might be deconstructed or reconciled to locate some form of agency or resistance.

British Psychological Society Psychology of Women Section annual conference

Jah Wobble defines music that works as subscribing to Kant's idea of an absolute morality that is filtered by the conditionality of its position in space and time. "The trick is to retain the absoluteness of a fixed structure, but in a way that's relative," he says. "That's what Miles Davis understood."

Guardian

Delegation to her husband Hugh is a critical part of Bea's rapid rise to social prominence. It was Hugh who found the magician who came to each table at Annabel's, tearing up the guests' £50 notes before restoring them to their owners. Bea and her husband share a delight in detail. Their Christmas card was a specially burned CD of obscure Eighties tracks with a picture of their baby on it.

***Evening Standard Magazine* on socialite Bea Vincenzini**

Oxford… is once again a metaphorical meeting place for ideas, inspiration and great teaching. Just as Laurent Blanc kissed the bald pate of Fabien Barthez before each game in France's glorious World Cup winning run, kiss the cover of the Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice before you open it. You will have found a true soul mate.

Chief Medical Officer
LIAM DONALDSON
OUP catalogue

Contributors: Strobes, Peter Kennealy, Anon, Robert Stoker, Philip Carter, Alan Gibbs.

£10 paid for all entries

Letters

Private Eye

Army game

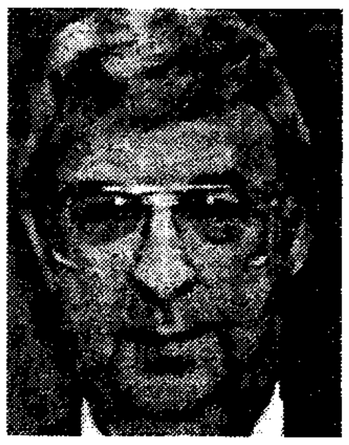
Sir,

In response to your article regarding OP TELIC and the ongoing deployment of British forces to the Gulf, I have to admit that the stories about us not having much kit and equipment are true. It is the height of cheek though for the Americans to call us "The Borrowers". George W. Bush has just borrowed 30,000 of our troops to fight his war...

Regards,
CAMMY (in the Army),

Via e-mail.

Non-lookalike



Derek Bond

Derek Sykes

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the complete lack of similarity between retired British businessman Derek Bond and international fraudster Derek Sykes?

I wonder if by any chance they are not related?

Yours faithfully,
EDGAR B. HOOVER,

Federal Bureau of Incompetence, Bush House, Washington.

Hart felt

Sir,

As an avid reader of your august organ for the past fifteen years, I was disappointed to read in the last issue about John Hart, now head of Glossopdale School. Mr Hart is my stepfather and has the dubious distinction of buying me my first copy of the Eye.

When Mr Hart took over Egerton Park School in the late eighties, it had around 500 pupils and 11% A-C exam results. Last year pupil numbers stood around 1500 and the exam results were above 40%. The fact he paid low paid workers in cash, was well known, and was certainly not done for personal gain. The finance committee and governing body were aware and it seems that only after he left it became a problem. Mr Hart also made ex-gratia payments to help families who were struggling financially buy uniform. This hardly makes him a crook and to compare him to Brian Lees is unfair.

Yours sincerely,
NATASHA DONALD,

Didsbury, Manchester.

It's writ in water

Sir,

Nice one by Brian Bagnall in Literary Review – except that Keats' name is not on his headstone. Am I the first pedantic reader to spot this grave error?

Sincerely,
MARK MENHINICK,

Via e-mail.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Hi! I'm Sean and instead of making fun of the audience, I've prepared some material"

Sic, sic, sic

Sir,

Re: Rotten Boroughs, Frank's for nothing, Issue 1073. I read with a sense of satisfactory and amusement the above article were you attempted to squirm out of your part in the injustice you levelled against me over the years. It was similar to the statement put out by Colin Pickthall MP, you must have conspired together on your articles.

Your article has got it wrong again, we were never charged with "conspiracy to defraud party accounts". We were charged with "Conspired together to defraud Jane Smith and others by deceiving them into accepting a return of election expenses together with supporting receipts as genuine." Your anonymous sources bottled out when it come to making their statements to the police about misappropriation of party funds. Even the police could not make that one stick.

The judge did not hold any part of the hearing behind closed doors. He put reporting restrictions on the first week of the trial, as he did not want statements in the case reported before the jury had heard the evidence, which appears to me to be a fair way of carrying out a trial. You can get the transcript of the trial through Chester Crown Court.

On Friday, it was clear that the judge wanted the CPS to drop the charges, but in an attempt to save face they refused. So on the Monday it took the judge 20 minutes to throw it out. When he brought the jury back in, he said in open court with journalist present, "These two men are not Guilty".

Yours truly,
JOHN FILLIS,

Ormskirk, Lancs.

Mr Kettle writes:

Sir,

Your rather lame item in the last issue about a former colleague, namely me, was as inaccurate as it was mean-spirited (Street of Shame, 1074).

I have not been invited to dispense advice on money-management by the Evening Standard as you claim. My recent article for that paper about wine investment was a simple job of reporting, in which I told readers about a handful of companies which offer expert advice in wine investment. At no point did I profess any expertise on the subject myself, only my own positive experience. Indeed, I made it clear that my own portfolio had been chosen for me by genuine experts. Furthermore, your suggestion that I possess expertise in cadging money is a vile slur on a man of probity. However, if anyone of my acquaintance wishes to send me a modest pourboire to ease my pain I would be most heartily obliged.

Yours in shuddering anguish,
CHRISTOPHER SILVESTER,

Notting Hill, London.

Brighton not beautiful

Sir,

Though I have no great desire to defend Brighton's councillors, I'm sure you'll find there are plenty of their own prepared to do that, I do feel compelled to correct the letter of correction published in your last issue concerning the listed Essoldo building.

Whilst it has previously been a popular concert venue, I believe one Jimi Hendrix performed there, the assertion that it was such during the 1980s is incorrect. During the 1980s it was, as Cllr Lythell pointed out, actually a Bingo Hall. The Top Rank your writer referred too was a successful live music venue situated 500 metres round the corner from the Essoldo building, in fact the Top Rank Suite lives on today as The Event, though predominantly catering for cheap student club nights rather than quality live music.

The rest of the letter, regarding the Essoldo's gutting for amusement arcade purposes and subsequent demolition, is correct. I should add that the retail/luxury apartment development now in its place is truly vile, even to my untrained eye.

Yours,
ANDY McKIRDY,

Brighton

Don't try this at home

Sir,

In case any Eye reader should be tempted to attempt practical confirmation of Dougie Lawson's assurance (Letters 1074) that sticking one's head into an oven full of natural gas is a safe procedure provided one doesn't ignite it, I feel it should be pointed out that though natural gas is not in itself toxic like carbon monoxide, it contains no oxygen and an individual breathing it on high enough concentration will be asphyxiated.

Yours faithfully,
DR BOB HEYS,

Ripponden, Halifax.

Lookalike

Turnage

Chacmool

Sir,

The figure of Chacmool at the RA's Aztec Exhibition, c.1100, looks awfully like our very own Mark-Anthony Turnage whose music has recently been celebrated at the Barbican.

Will his music survive more than 900 years? I doubt it.

Yours etc,
ENA B. RUSHTON,

London SW6.

Babe magnet

Sir,

I read with interest your item on Ms Dynamite. I am sure you have in your possession a photograph showing another such young lady who is receiving the close attention of a newspaper editor purely because of her political intellect and campaigning I am sure.

Yours,
SIMON ROBINSON,

Hampton.

Skippy the Pro-Bush Kangaroo

"Economic self interest... oil... evil Saddam... big business... regime change... terrorist link... kick butt... etc..."

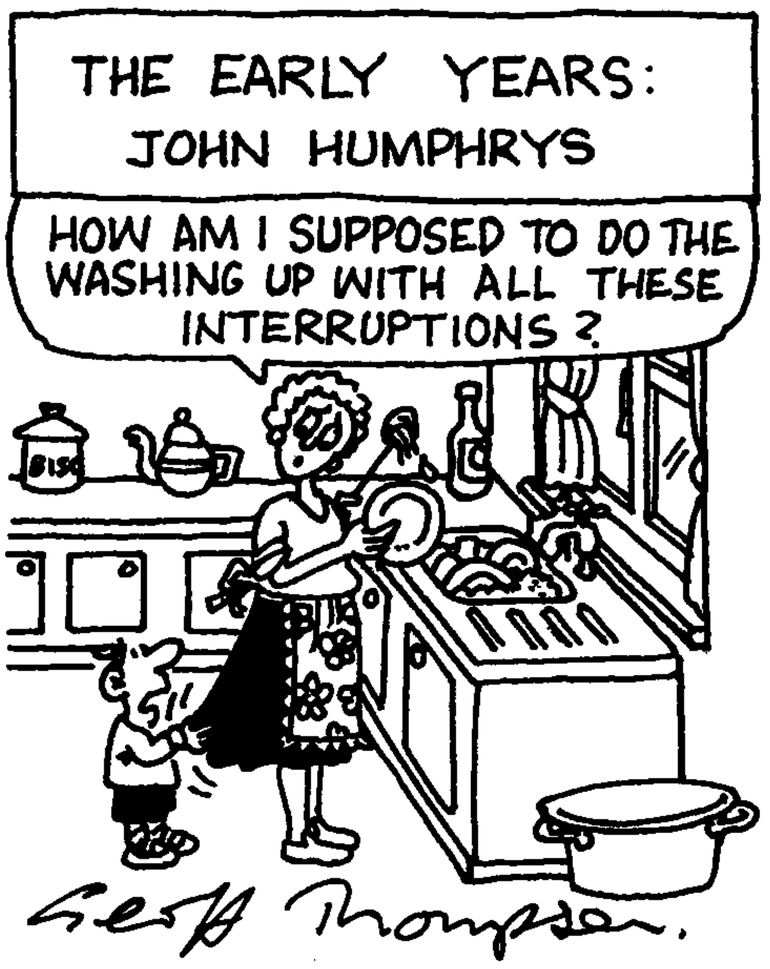
Blow-up doll

Sir,

Re: The Brit Awards. What kind of hypocrite does Miss Dynamite think she is? Singing anti-war songs to gain popular sympathy while promoting high explosives through her silly stage name is nothing more than cynical double dealing. She should change her name or shut up.

Yours faithfully,
EDNA SEMTEX (MRS),

Via e-mail.



Not us

Sir,

You are wrong to suggest that BBC Worldwide licensed footage of the Hillsborough tragedy to Michael Moore for his feature film "Bowling for Columbine".

Though the BBC is credited at the end of the film, this was for other material that it supplied, namely footage of the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of York. How Mr Moore's production team obtained footage of the disaster in his film is only for them to explain, but I can categorically state that it was not with our help.

To answer your claim that BBC Worldwide sold footage of Hillsborough to TLC to illustrate images of football hooliganism, I can further state that BBC Worldwide does not endorse the use of any BBC footage in any way that would misrepresent this or any other tragic event.

The material used by TLC was licensed in good faith and according to strict BBC guidelines. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the footage was used in a misleading and inappropriate manner. We made strong representation to TLC about the misuse of the material and as a result of this the programme was pulled and the BBC made the decision that it would no longer license any footage of the Hillsborough disaster.

We deeply regret any offence or distress caused to anyone involved in the tragedy.

Yours sincerely,
MARK FRICKER,

Commercial Director, BBC Library Sales.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

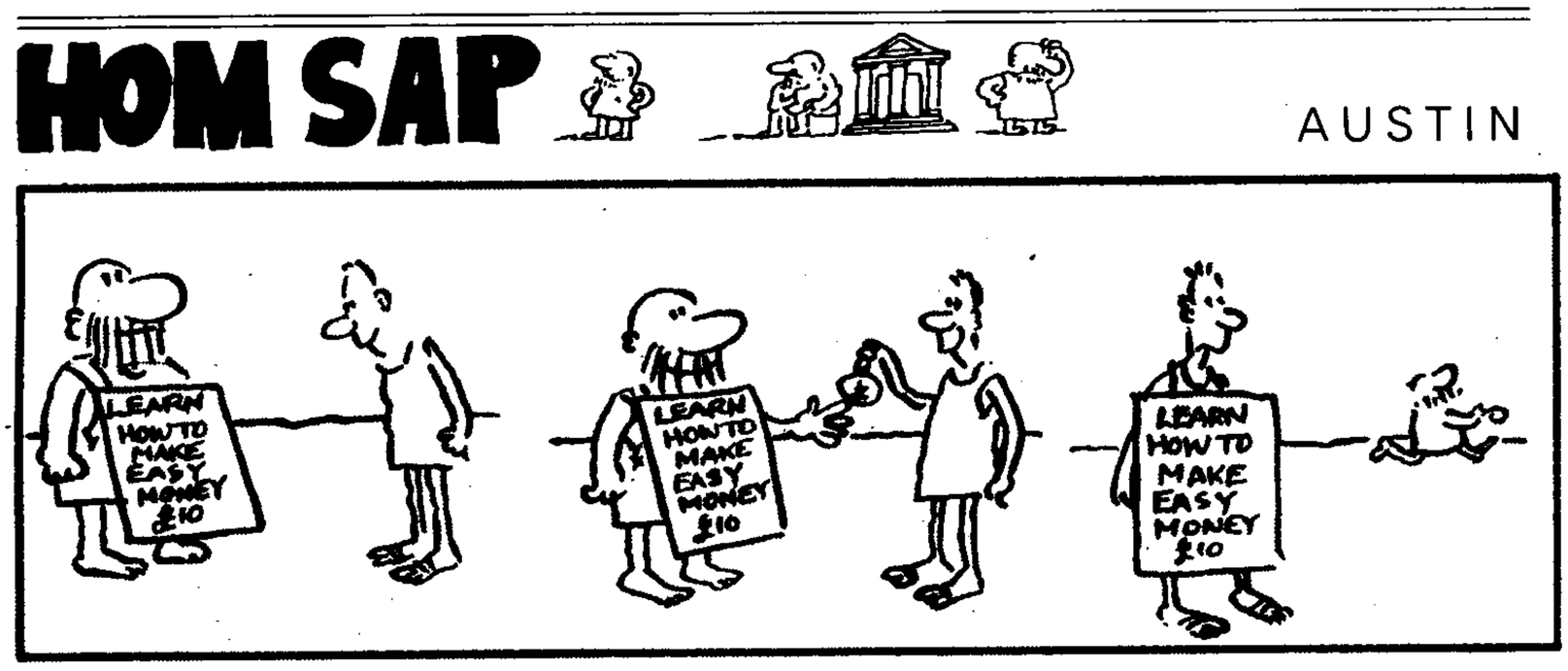
"It was a last-minute end to the game, wasn't it?"
STEVE MAY, Radio 4
(David Hills)

"He [Repka] has hardly been on the pitch as many times as he's played."
ALVIN MARTIN, Talksport Radio
(M. Todd)

"Afterwards we were told that the cameras trained on us as we sat on the toilets were fake. I was so relieved."
Fame Academy's MARLI BUCK, LBC
(Paul Coia)

"Their heads were on their chins..."
HENRY BLOFELD, Test Match Special
(Dick Lee)

"Our goalkeeper didn't have a save to make in 90 minutes. And yet he still ended up conceding four goals."
JOE ROYLE, BBC Online
(Dominic Birch)



Letter from **Asmara**
from Our Own Correspondent

IT WAS all meant to be so different. In Eritrea we had to wait 30 years longer than everyone else in Africa for our independence. And we had to fight before the colonialists – from next door in Ethiopia – were sent packing in 1993. It was a bitter struggle and it made us tough. Not for us the corruption and incompetence that has blighted the continent. Our leaders were different – war heroes and freedom fighters, in the vanguard of an African renaissance.

Ten years on, and we live in a virtual prison, riddled with famine and growing unrest. Our once self-effacing president, Isaias Aferwerki, is no Mobutu. But his grand new villa is nearing completion – a splendid building none of us mere mortals will ever visit. We can also take pride in a new national airline, although not much besides – ordinary folk stand almost no chance of getting an exit visa to leave, even for a short while.

Late and short rains last summer caused a poor harvest across the country. Cattle are dying. Negligence and ineptitude have turned an otherwise survivable drought into a famine on a scale approaching the 1984 disaster.

Press-ganging of civilians into our already huge and embittered army continues apace. People can spend years in military service, from school age upwards, guarding dusty flags at desolate border posts or building roads effectively as a form of bonded labour. All this despite World Bank loans for demobilisation – the legacy of our bloody, costly and pointless conflict with Ethiopia in 1998. The national and military service pay of 145 Nakfa (about $US8 per month) is inadequate to relieve desperate families, or even ensure survival for individuals.

Other restrictions on daily life are commonplace. Ethiopian music and language have been banned and the free press was curbed in 2001 for "unbalancing reconstruction efforts". Failure to face economic reality by maintaining artificial exchange rates has encouraged a flourishing black market. Rather than deal with the underlying causes, we prefer simply to arrest the moneychangers. Senior government members – including four ministers, three generals and an ambassador – have been imprisoned without trial for disagreeing with Isaias' whims.

Beyond the relative affluence of Asmara, our elegant capital, children suffer from extreme malnutrition, taking on the swollen belly of the African stereotype, with aid agencies struggling to wade through the morass of bureaucracy and institutional apathy. There is some food aid arriving in the main port of Massawa. Ancient Italian trucks loaded with sacks emblazoned with the stars and stripes crawl up the escarpment on a daily basis. Distribution should be an easy task in such a small country, but food never seems to find its way to those who really need it. It remains in government warehouses or goes to feed the army.

In a further sign of the siege mentality of our rulers, little of what foreign money comes into Eritrea seems to stay long. Private depositors who try to take their money out of hard currency accounts are told to come back another day – the dollars have already been shifted to banks abroad.

The government says it has every reason to be paranoid. The Ethiopians, officials insist, do not want peace, so we must be ready for war. But it's also a convenient excuse for a malaria-addled president addicted to power. It allows him to deal with threats real or imagined and to justify the incompetence that surrounds him.

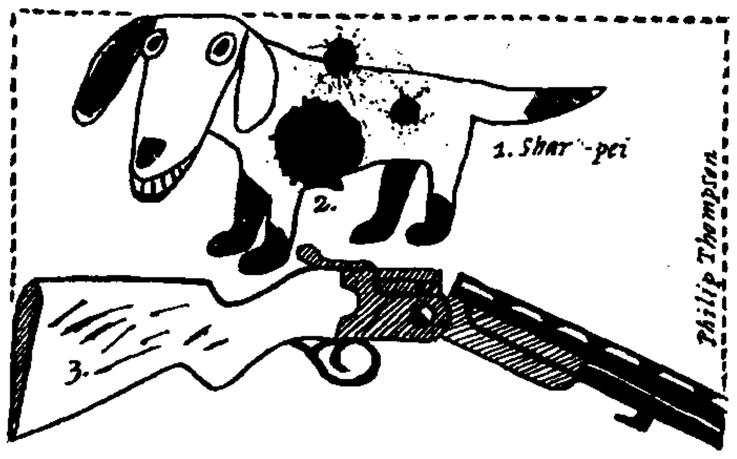
It's unthinkable, but there are even whispers in the coffee shops of revolt. But that won't happen soon: our coast line runs along the Red Sea, with Massawa port handily placed for the Gulf – as our American friends, who have block-booked a clutch of apartments in the town, have realised. With Dubya's boys around, Isaias, unlike so many of his compatriots, should be just fine.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It seems that Raymond Poore Junior telephoned his wife at work, and told her he was going to kill the family dog," a police spokesman told reporters in Winchester, Virginia. "She was distraught, and begged him not to, because it was only a small dog. But he said the animal had bitten him, and had to die, so he was going to kill it with his shotgun. Then he hung up.

"She rushed home as quickly as she could, expecting to find her beloved pet shar-pei dead. But instead, she found her husband lying on the floor unconscious in a pool of blood, with a



gunshot through his abdomen, and with the dog standing beside him. She called an ambulance, and he was rushed to Winchester Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

"We have examined the shotgun, and found that the stock of the weapon was damaged, and that there was blood and dog hair on it. At present, we're working on the theory that Mr Poore must have tried to beat the dog to death with the butt end of the gun while holding the barrel. But there was a cartridge in the breech, and he hadn't put the safety catch on, and we presume that the gun must have gone off on impact, fatally injuring him in the process. An animal control officer has now taken custody of the dog, which has a few superficial injuries, but seems otherwise unharmed." *(Associated Press, 24/1/03. Spotter: Mike McEvoy)*

—●—

●"The SoloTrek Exo-Skeletor is a piece of aviation history," Michael Moshier told reporters in Sunnyvale, California, "and nobody else has developed anything close to this. Strap-on jetpacks that allow you to fly through the air are no longer just for James Bond or Buck Rogers, we're making them right here in the factory. And we'll sell you one today, if you have the money, so long as you promise never to use it."

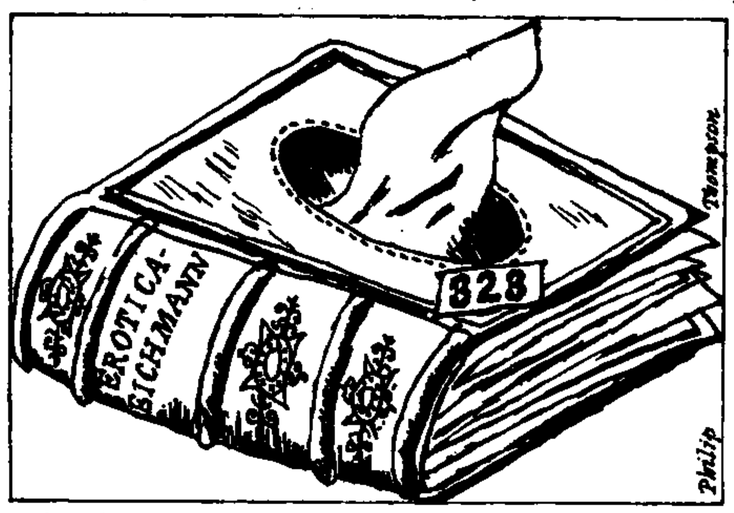
Moshier, the CEO of Trek Aerospace, was speaking after the latest test flight of the SoloTrek Exo-Skeletor Flying Vehicle, a gasoline-powered personal strap-on flying machine. "Thanks to these twin thruster fans, the SoloTrek can launch and land on a space the size of a dining room table. It can carry a pilot and baggage up to 122kgs, can travel at 80mph, and can fly 150 miles on one tank of gasoline. And in theory, it can ascend up to 2,400 metres, but because it isn't very stable at present, we've never actually taken it higher than 1.5 metres.

"We've recently started to sell the prototypes, to raise enough money to go into full production. But because we don't want any nasty crashes, or any lawsuits due to death or injury, anyone who buys a machine will have to sign a 'no-fly' contract before they take possession of their SoloTrek. And just to be sure, we will remove some key components before sale, to guarantee that the flying machine stays permanently on the ground.

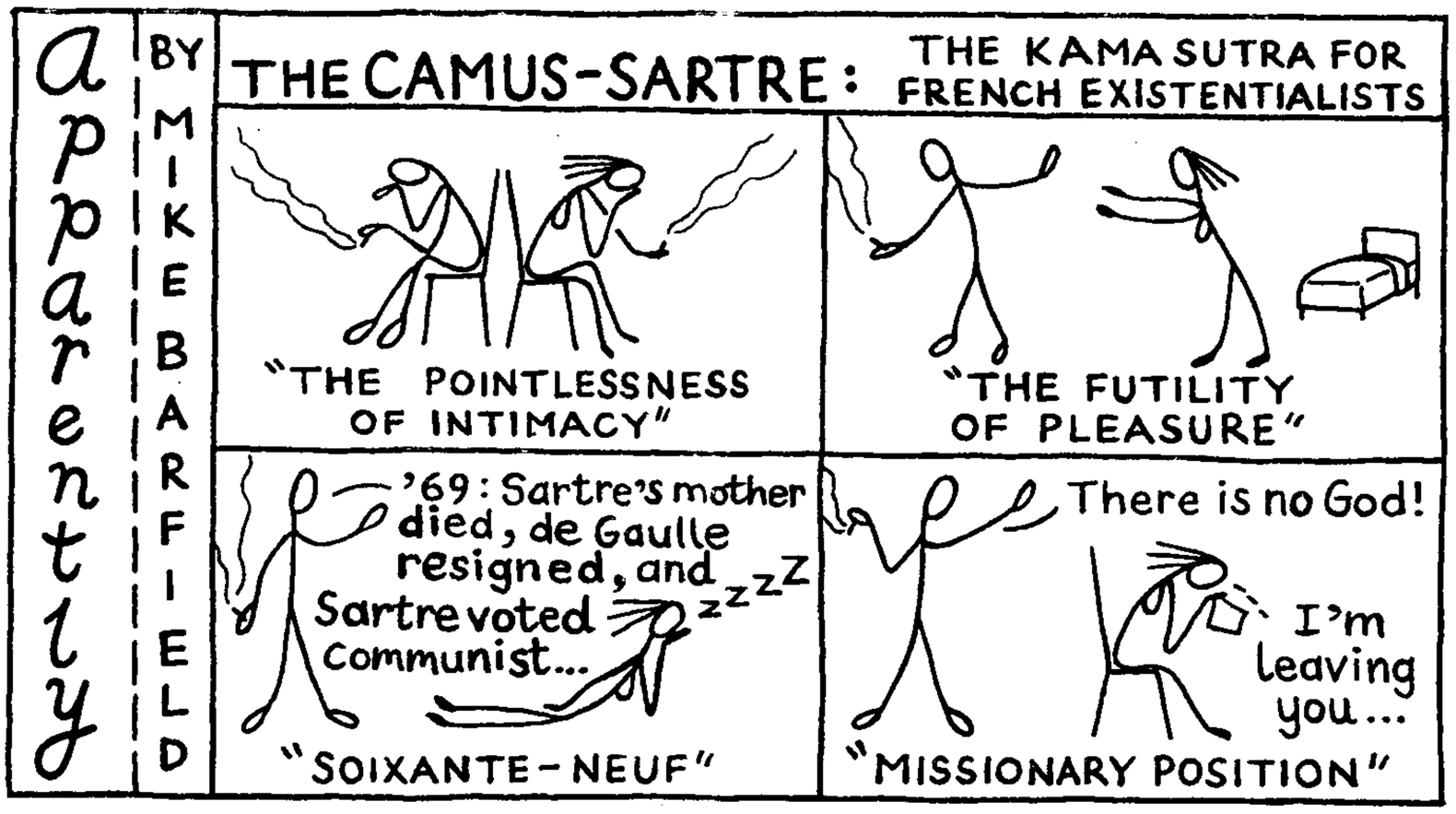
"When we've ironed out the technical bugs, and sorted out the legal issues, we hope that ordinary commuters will be able to strap themselves in and fly to work, hopping over traffic lights and avoiding traffic jams. But until then, I'm afraid you can buy, but you can't fly." *(Globe & Mail, 13/1/03, and Salina Journal 15 January 2002. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

—●—

● **Auction: Catalogue of Printed Books.**
323. Erotica–Eichmann (Heinrich) Kunst-studien über den nackten Menschlichen Körper, one vol. only, loose plates, some lacking, some inserted from another work, several heavily



stained and partially stuck together, original half cloth portfolio, worn and stained, folio, Berlin & New York, n.d.; sold not subject to return. £30-40. (Bloomsbury Book Auctions, 30/1/03. Spotter: Robin Blake)


Apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
THE CAMUS-SARTRE: THE KAMA SUTRA FOR FRENCH EXISTENTIALISTS
"THE POINTLESSNESS OF INTIMACY"
"THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE"
'69: Sartre's mother died, de Gaulle resigned, and Sartre voted Communist... zzzZ
"SOIXANTE-NEUF"
There is no God!
I'm leaving you...
"MISSIONARY POSITION"

AL QAEDA SUSPECT ARRESTED

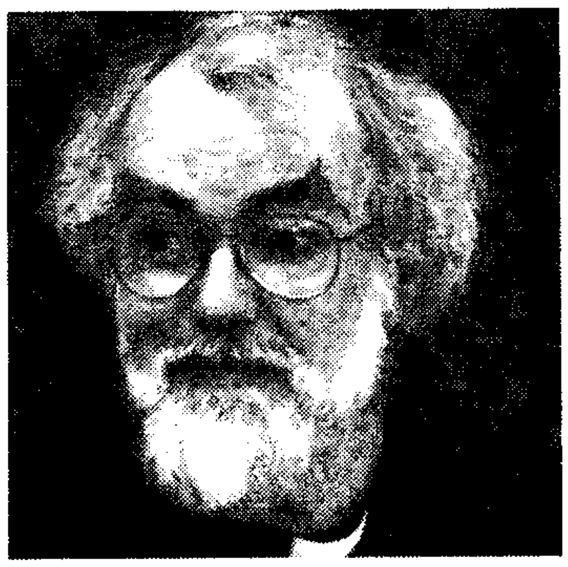
by Our Security Staff **Lunchtime O'Nowevegotthewrongman**

POSSIBLY the world's most wanted terrorist was today seized as he was having dinner with Prince Charles.

The bearded fanatic is thought to have been one of Osama bin Laden's top henchmen in the fight against America and has long been on the FBI's list of "Most Bearded Men".

Said a senior FBI source, "we were tipped off about this fanatical bearded cleric whom we think is the world's most dangerous man".

Later, it emerged that the FBI had made a mistake, and that the so-called terrorist was an innocent Archbishop of Canterbury.



Said the FBI source, "It was an unfortunate case of mistaken identity. Rowan Williams is the wrong man. We meant to arrest Mr David Blunkett."

Said the Archbishop, "I think it was St Anselm who said that if we search deep into *(cont. p. 94)*

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2003

UNIVERSITIES SNUB MIDDLE-CLASS CHILDREN – WILL HOUSE PRICES BE AFFECTED?

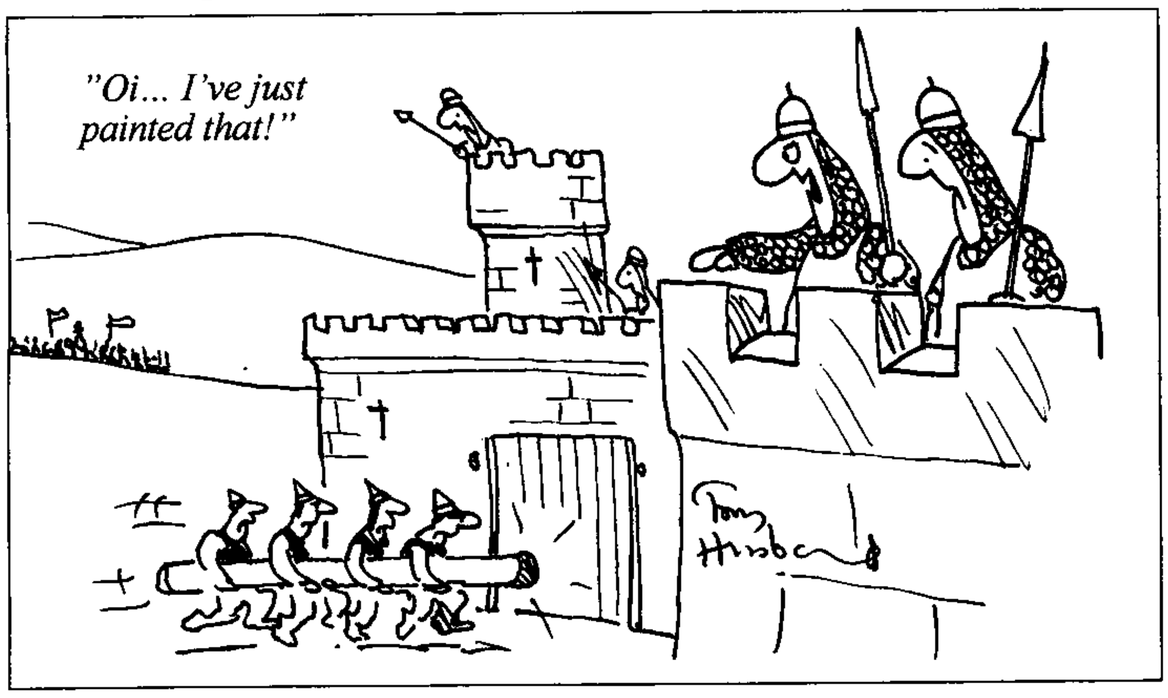
By Our Daily Mail Staff
Clare Monger

THE NEWS that middle-class children are to be barred from Britain's top universities in favour of asylum seekers has come as a blow to home owners all over the country.

"If our children cannot go to university" one distraught parent told us, "then we will not have to pay top-up fees nor will we have to pay for private education. This means we will all be hugely rich and will be able to buy bigger and more expensive houses."

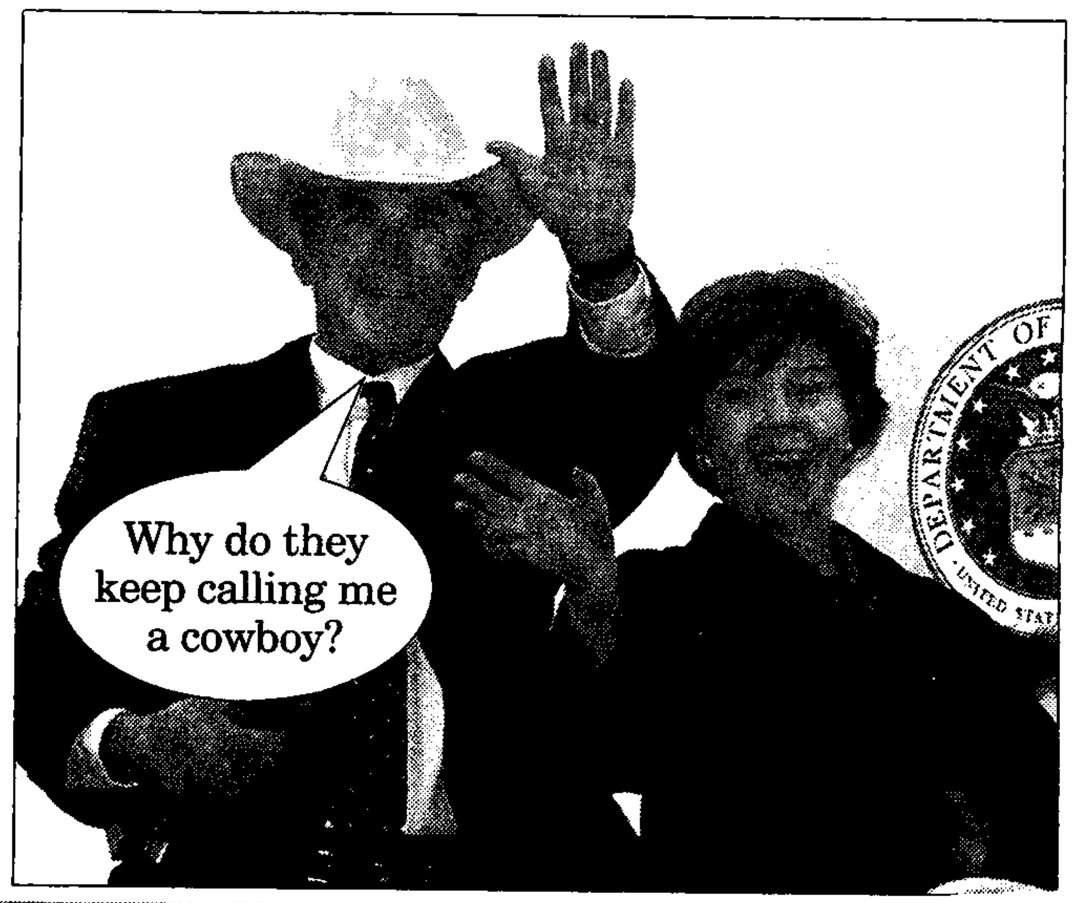
But a Daily Mail expert warned "I wouldn't get too excited about

this. According to a report on page 7 of this newspaper, if you dye your hair blond then you will die of cancer which will create a lot of single parent families who need to sell their houses at a lower price and who" *(cont. p. 94)*

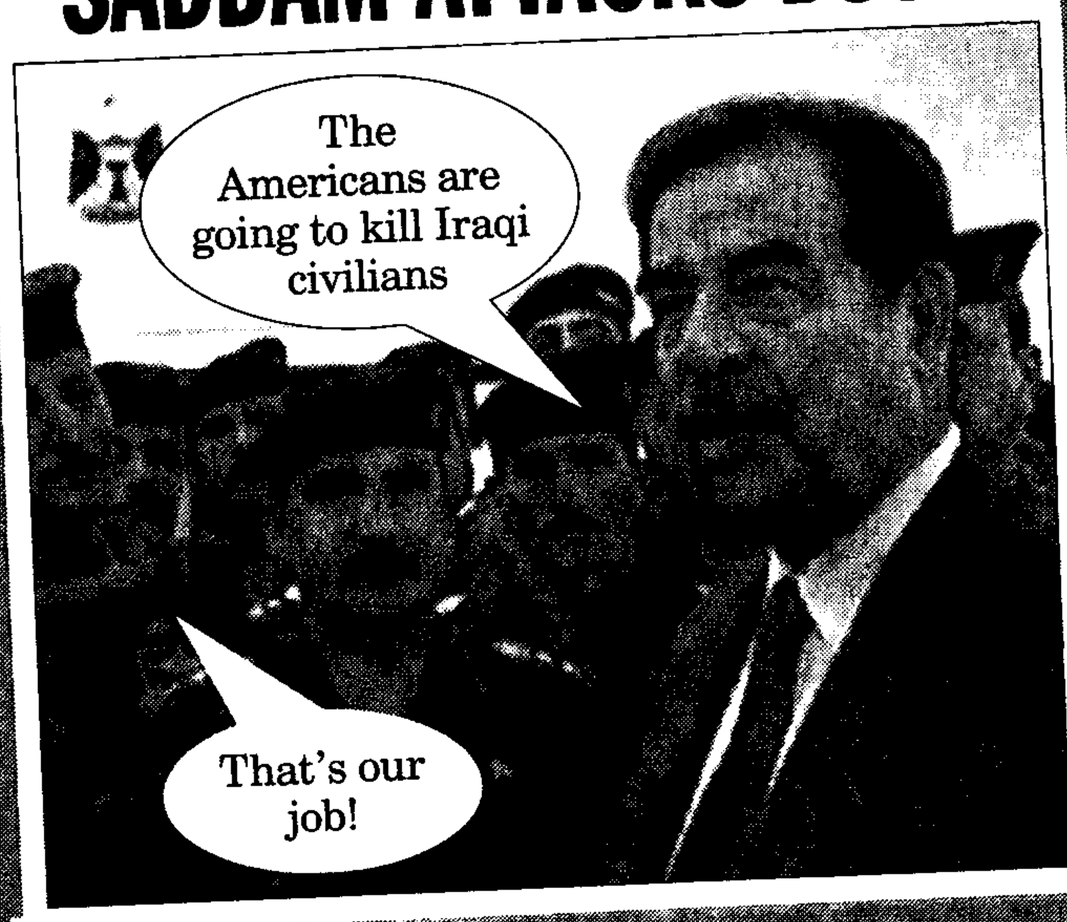


THE WEEK IN PICTURES

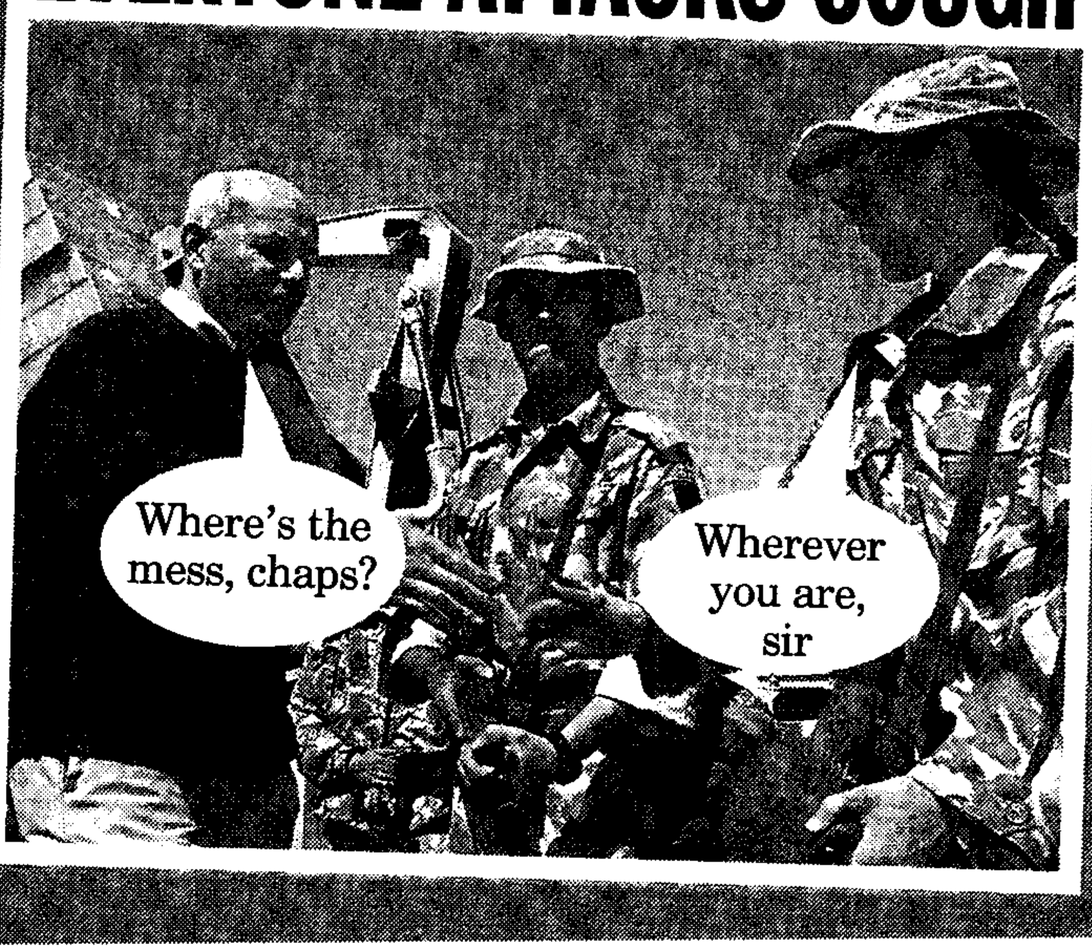
BUSH ATTACKS CRITICS



SADDAM ATTACKS BUSH



EVERYONE ATTACKS COUGH



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And an especially warm hullo to all parishioners who were not present at last week's parish meeting to discuss the Rev. Dubya's great moral crusade against the Evil One.

I was only able to stay a short while myself, since I had an important prior engagement with our local radio station.

I see that I have been criticised in some quarters for not staying around to listen to what all the usual timewasters and malcontents in the parish had to say.

But, frankly, I've heard it all so often before that it was hardly going to change my mind, when I've known all along that my view of the situation is the only one which any sensible person could hold.

I'm hardly going to change my mind as a result of listening to Mr Kilfoyle, Mr Marshall-Andrews and 120 others, all droning on in the same vein, am I? After all, even if I had stayed, what would I have heard?

"We need more time, Vicar."

How much more time do they want? I ask them. (Or I would have done if I could have been bothered to sit around waiting for Mrs Jowell to hand out the coffee and biscuits.)

Two weeks? Four weeks? Two months? A thousand years?

And all the time Satan is prowling the world, weaving his web of evil and seeking whomsoever he may devour *(Book of Resolutions, 14.41)*.

Can't we just imagine the celebrations that there must have been in the city of Babylon when they heard the news of how the St Albion's PCC had supported them in what my friend the Rev. Dubya has so eloquently called their "evilitude"?

They must certainly have been cracking open the champagne in Baghdad when they heard the contributions from our one-time tombola organiser Mr Chris Smith (whose partner no doubt agreed with him!) or Mr Dobson (who had to be replaced as the Mayor of London in our Christmas panto because he couldn't remember his lines and wasn't any good anyway!).

I don't want to be personal, but really I wish some of these no-doubt well-intentioned parishioners would learn to keep quiet on subjects about which they, frankly, know nothing at all.

Look, you remember the story of David and Goliath in the Bible story. One of the most moving accounts in Scripture of a man having the courage to do what he knows to be right against overwhelming odds.

I expect that there were a lot of silly people then saying "Give Goliath more

time" or "How do we know Goliath has got a sword of mass-destruction when there's no evidence that it exists?"

But David was a leader, not a follower. He was a fighter, not a quitter (in the words which my friend Mr Mandelson has had stencilled on the side of his white van, under the slogan "Handy Mandy – I'm Here For You 24/7, Any Job Would Be Welcome").

So, in spite of the Doubting Thomases, David went out and launched a pre-emptive strike (with a "smart" slingshot!) at the head of his enemy and within a few seconds it was all over!

The result was that there was no collateral damage to any bystanders, democracy was restored to the Philistineans and the children of Israel were allowed to live in peace happily ever after.

And, above all, I would remind you that all those fainthearts who had sneered at the simple shepherd boy, Tony, felt pretty silly when he went on to reign over them as king for 40 glorious years!

I hope you will all get the message of this ancient but still very relevant story and realise that it is best to ignore everyone if they don't agree with you!

Yours, Tony

Parish Postbag

There have been so many letters, faxes and emails this week in support of the Vicar that we have been overwhelmed. It would be invidious to single out any one of them above the rest, so we have decided not to publish any of them. A.C.

A Message From The Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons

High Non

It's "High Noon", partners! Remember the old movie when the good guy stands alone and the yellow-bellies won't help him fight the baddies – they all stand around saying "Non"? Well, the big hand of the celestial clock pointeth even now to the hour of noon, when Satan's train arrives in the station and the Evil One swaggers into town and is brought low by a hail of lead.

Brothers and sisters, now is the time to decide. Are you for me or against me? Are we walking tall together, or are y'all walking small alone, like the pesky little crittur Ch-iraq from Franceland? Boot Hill's full of craven yellow-bellies like our friend Frère Jacques, who'd sooner shoot you in the back than look you in the eye. Yes, indeed! Time's run out. I'm goin' in! Remember Grace Kelly singing the movie's theme tune "Do not forsake me, oh my Dubya".

Way to go! W.

Women's Groups

There was an excellent turnout on Tuesday when the Vicar's wife welcomed us to the vicarage for a chance to hear her friend Carole Caplin talking about "the dangers of addiction". Miss Caplin explained how one addiction can often lead to another. She told the sad story of someone she knew about who had been an alcoholic and then become addicted to marathon running.

It was very likely, she predicted, that he would soon be dead of a heart attack, which would serve him right for being so horrid to her. Ms Booth then proposed a vote of thanks to the speaker and glasses of holistic yoghurt were then served to the audience at a very reasonable price of £20 each (all proceeds donated to the Caplin Foundation for Distressed Fraudsters). C.B.

***The editor comments: I have included the above report in full in order to show that I have nothing against Ms Caplin and am happy to let her demonstrate what a nasty, vindictive and mad woman she is. A.C.**

POLLY FILLER

THAT'S IT! That's the last children's party I'm giving! Twenty demented five-year-olds screaming their heads off and throwing food around is not my idea of fun!

You would have thought that their mummies might try and control them, but think again – because of course the mothers *weren't there!* Instead an assortment of asylum seekers pretending to be nannies feebly attempted to stop their charges being rude to the entertainer – the hugely expensive and overrated Mr Twizzle, whose jokes were frankly inappropriate and whose balloon animals actually caused my son Charlie to burst into tears! Thanks a lot, Mr Swizzle! Charlie quite reasonably asked for a Tyrannosaurus Rex and was fobbed off with a balloon giraffe. No wonder he set fire to Mr Twizzle's puppet theatre!

Needless to say, it's all the fault of the useless Simon, who should have booked HMS Belfast as planned, or even the Imperial War Museum or the London Dungeon sleepover, but oh no – he was too busy watching Extreme Celebrity Backgammon introduced by Victoria Coren on BBC Plus World 3 and then it was too late!

So poor Charlie and his mates had to make do with tea at Soho House and an apology for an entertainer whose act was completely thrown by something as minor as a medium-sized fire. Unprofessional or what?

And is it just me? Or are other people's children incredibly badly brought up? This lot had no manners and weren't even slightly sympathetic when the birthday boy threw up his chocolate gateau into their going-home bags. Honestly, I blame the parents for indulging their little brats and producing a generation of what I call greedy and self-obsessed mini-monsters.

I AM only grateful that I witnessed this fiasco on video rather than in person since as a working mum I was taking a well-earned and desperately needed battery-charging two-week break in the French Alps.

Had I been at the party I would at least have made a decent job of recording the event, as opposed to the ham-fisted attempt by the inept Lönka. A word of advice for next time, dear – on the Canon Elura MCV80 the zoom facility button is on the right. The one on the left activates the anti-shake hand control system! Honestly! Don't they teach these Kosovan girls anything these days!

Next year I am going to organise Charlie's party myself – in fact I've already done so and booked Sabrina at "Surprise Surprise Party Organisers" (Notting Hill) to make sure there are no mistakes!

And one last word – whichever dim woman gave Charlie the Harry Potter 2 video game as a present – he's got it already, for heaven's sake, which makes your thoughtlessness a real waste of £44.99!!

Call yourself a mother!

©Polly Filler.

THOSE BAFTAS IN FULL

Sir Stephen Spry *(for it is he)*: And here to introduce the next award is the moist and multifellatius, the orgasmically overblessed maestro of the moustache, Sir Ian Goosy Gandalf...

Sir Ian McKellan *(for it is her)*: Ooh, er... cheeky monkey! *(Puts on serious face.)* My Lords, Ladies, Members of the Academy, it is my very great privilege to announce the nominations for Most Serious Film.

(Shot of dim actresses suddenly looking very serious in audience.)

Sir Gandalf: And the nominations are Stephen Dreary for "Two Suicides and a Funeral" *(Sombre applause.)*, Martin Scorphewwhatastinker for "The Hats of New York".

(More sombre applause. Shot of Daniel Day-Release with shaved head.)

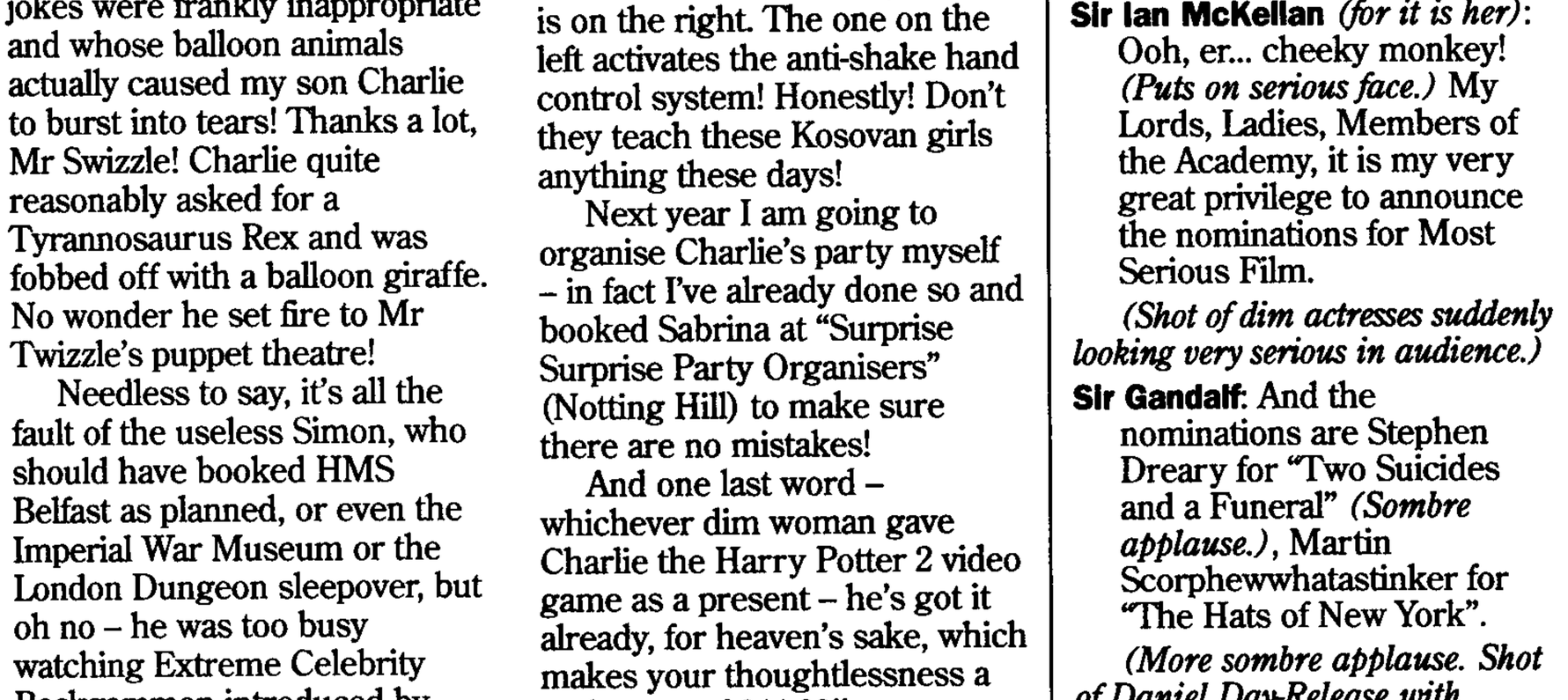
Dame Serena McLuvvie: And Roman Polanski for his incredible autobiographical film "The Paedophile". *(Surely "The Pianist"? Ed.)*

(Even more sombre applause at mention of Holocaust but no mention of statutory rape charge involving under-age girl.)

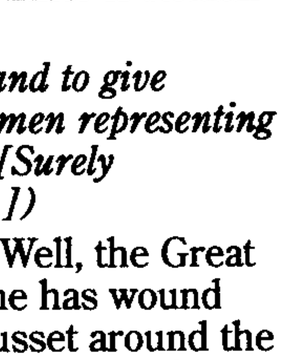
And the winner is Roman Holiday.

(Audience stand to give ovation to some men representing fugitive pianist. [Surely 'paedophile'? Ed.])

Sir Crispin Fry: Well, the Great Dame of Time has wound her weary gusset around the Delphic orifice that is this event and we must move on to the next of our cornucopia of cunnilinguistical categories (and there's something to get your tongue around), it's the Lifetime of Making Money Award which tonight goes to the extraordinary Solly J. Brolly whose legendary career spans *(continues in similar vein for 94 hours)*


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
WHEN I USED TO PLAY YOU WERE LUCKY TO EARN THE SAME AS A FACTORY WORKER...
SIR BOBBY ROBSON
SO REMEMBER THAT EVERYTIME YOU GO OUT AND PLAY ON SATURDAY!
YES SIR BOBBY
YTD
YTD
FANCY WORKING IN A FACTORY, YOU TWATS!

Cricket World Cup – Latest Scores



Australia 487-1 in 50 overs (Gilchrist 483*); **Belarus** 35 (Kalashnikov 13)

Pakistan 711-2 (Anwar Saeed 710*); **Venezuela** 6 (Extras 6)

England 49-7; **Cambodia** 50-0 (Pol Pot 35*)

(That's enough cricket. Ed.)

Notes & Queries

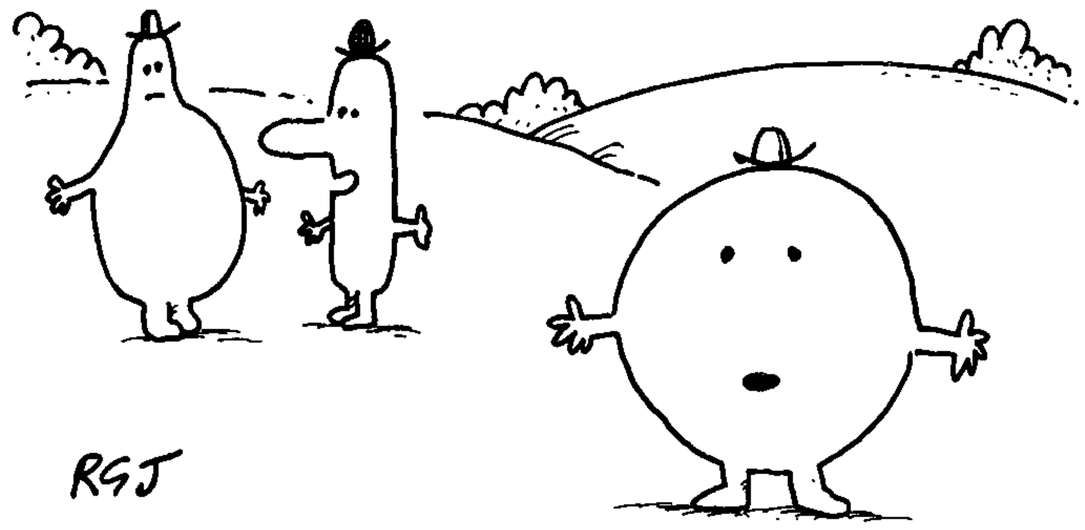
QUESTION: Do any of your readers know how the Scottish Widows insurance company got its name?

☐ A.F. of Kircudbright writes: Scotland's first insurance company was a small friendly society formed by the shopkeepers of Auchtermuchty in the late 17th century. Unhappily, its treasurer, one Gordon McBrown, invested all the assets of the company in the stock market, which proceeded to collapse, leaving the Auchtermuchty Mutual Support Association bankrupt. Seeing that they had lost all chance of a wee pension for their old age, many of the society's members committed suicide, leaving a townful of impoverished widows. These canny ladies then clubbed together and purchased a lottery ticket, which proved to bear the winning number, thus enabling them to enjoy a long and prosperous retirement.

Question: Can anyone tell me how the *Times* political correspondent Michael Gove pronounces his name? Does it rhyme with "Stove" or "Glove"?

☐ THE answer is neither, writes Sir Peter Stoatherd. Gove is an ancient Channel Islands name and comes from the Norman French "Gové" (to rhyme with Beauvais), meaning a man who in feudal times performed the invaluable task of collecting night soil to spread on the fields. Chaucer has such a character, Master Gove, of whom he makes fun in The Twytter's Tale.

Answers, please, to the following: Are white elephants really white? Who invented the circular teabag? Why hasn't Taki been sacked from *The Spectator* by Boris Johnson?



"Mr Happy's not the same since he had Botox"

GOODBYE, DUNCAN COUGH – HULLO, DUNCAN LAUGH!

by Our Political Staff **Mike Giggle**

IN THE most dramatic policy u-turn the Conservative Party has known since the fall of Mrs Thatcher, the Tory leader has changed his name from the traditional 'Duncan Cough', the name under which he was not known to millions of voters, to the new, modernising, accessible, voter-friendly name of 'Duncan Laugh'.

Announcing this rebranding strategy on the *Today* programme, the Leader of the Opposition told listeners, "Ha ha ha ha ha ha."

Where Duncan Laugh stands on the major issues of the day

Asylum Seekers: "Ha ha ha ha ha."
Iraq: "Ho ho ho ho ho."
Congestion charge: "Hee hee hee hee hee."
Michael Portillo: "What a bastard. I'll get him!"

(reprinted from *Saga* magazine)

Never Too Old To Sue

by **The Rt. Hon. Emma Soames**

AT THE incredible age of 89, world-famous libel lawyer **Peter Carter-Ruck** is still enjoying his libel as much as ever.

"Nothing in the world gives me greater pleasure than a good writ," he says with a mischievous smile, as he sits in his Essex conservatory.

He is surrounded by copies of the day's newspapers, which he peruses with the enthusiasm of a man twice his age.

"Here's one," he says, stubbing his finger at a paragraph from the 'In The Courts' section of the Barking Echo.

"If this fellow plays his cards right, he could make £50,000 and I could make even more," says the veteran *(cont. p. 94)*

To The Editor Of The Guardian

We, the undersigned, all members of the British Rabbit Breeders Association, wish to put on record our unqualified opposition to any war in Iraq, unless sanctioned by a second UN resolution.

Frank Angora
R.B.J. Shuttleworth
Rachel Smelt
The Bishop of Oxford
Suleiman Papadoulis
Angela Ziegler
Nathan Ferret
Lady Natasha Rufus-Isaacs
and 214 others

(You can see the full list on our website: *www.rabbitbreedersagainstthewar.com*)

● I hope the American 'smart bombs' are a good deal smarter than the American President.

Mike Giggler
(Via e-mail)

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JUSTICE SHAMED

THE treatment of Matthew Kelly has been little short of a national scandal. One of our best-loved TV performers has been made to endure a living hell of baseless innuendo and unfounded suspicion which threatened to end his entire career. All this *ON NO EVIDENCE AT ALL.*

Brave Matthew was targeted solely because of his celebrity in a smear campaign of hate and lies.

Today he stands a totally innocent man. But there *are* guilty men in this shocking story. Ourselves. *(Surely the police? Ed.)*

ON OTHER PAGES

● 100s of pix of Kelly looking a bit weird **2**
● Can there be no smoke without fire? **3**
● Unfunny 'Stars in your underpants' cartoon by repentant Mac **94**

From the cabdrivers of London

An Apology To Mr Ken Livingstone Over The Introduction Of The Congestion Charge February 2003

That Red Ken, you've got to hand it to him. Bloody brilliant. I know last week we all said he should be strung up because it was the only language he understood. But to a man us cabbies are putting our hands up and saying, "Ken, you're a diamond mayor. You was right and we was wrong." Credit where it's due. Take this morning, right! I am at Euston and pick up this fare who wants to go to the Aldwych. Normally, in rush-hour traffic, you're looking at an hour and a half. But this morning it took me eleven minutes. I checked it on my watch. I mean, I've driven a cab on Christmas Day and there's been more traffic than there is with this congestion charge. No, he's a very clever man. Very clever indeed. I had that Steven Norris in the back of the cab once. Now there's someone who should be strung up. What a prat.

Issued on behalf of the Operators of Taximeter Carriages and Licensed Cabriolets in the Greater London Area. February 2003.

● *If you've recently been in a taxi or you have strong views about the congestion charge, send us your comments at www.stringemup.gov*

DAILY TELEGRAPH

The Scumbag Who Won't Back Our Boys

By Our Political Staff
Boris Notgodunov

AS THOUSANDS of British troops prepare to risk their lives in the scorching desert sun of Iraq, Liberal Democrat leader Charles "Chamberlain" Kennedy last night raised the white flag in a craven bid to appease the most evil dictator in the history of the world.

The quisling Kennedy, following in the limp-wristed tradition of Jeremy Thorpe and Lord Haw-Haw, stated categorically that he would not support the British troops who are preparing to risk their lives in *(You've done this bit. Ed.)* again," she told the Telegraph last night. "From now on it will be Tory every time."

Coward

Said Mrs Caroline Madeup-Name (whose son Lieut. Simon Madeup-Name sailed for the Gulf only yesterday), "Charles Kennedy makes me ashamed to be British – to think of our boys dying in the sand while he sits swilling whisky in the House of Commons makes you sick.

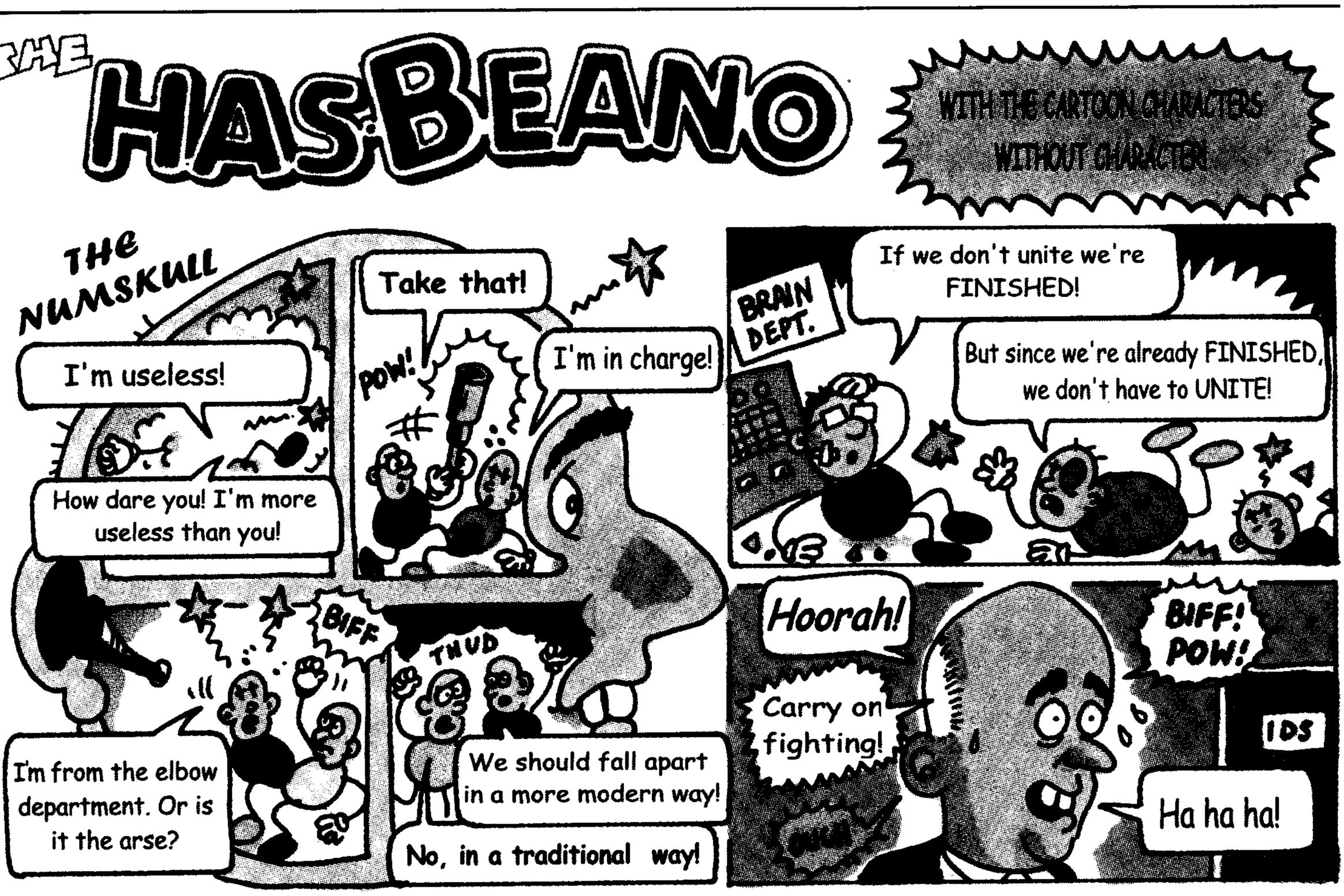
"I will never vote Lib Dem

On Other Pages

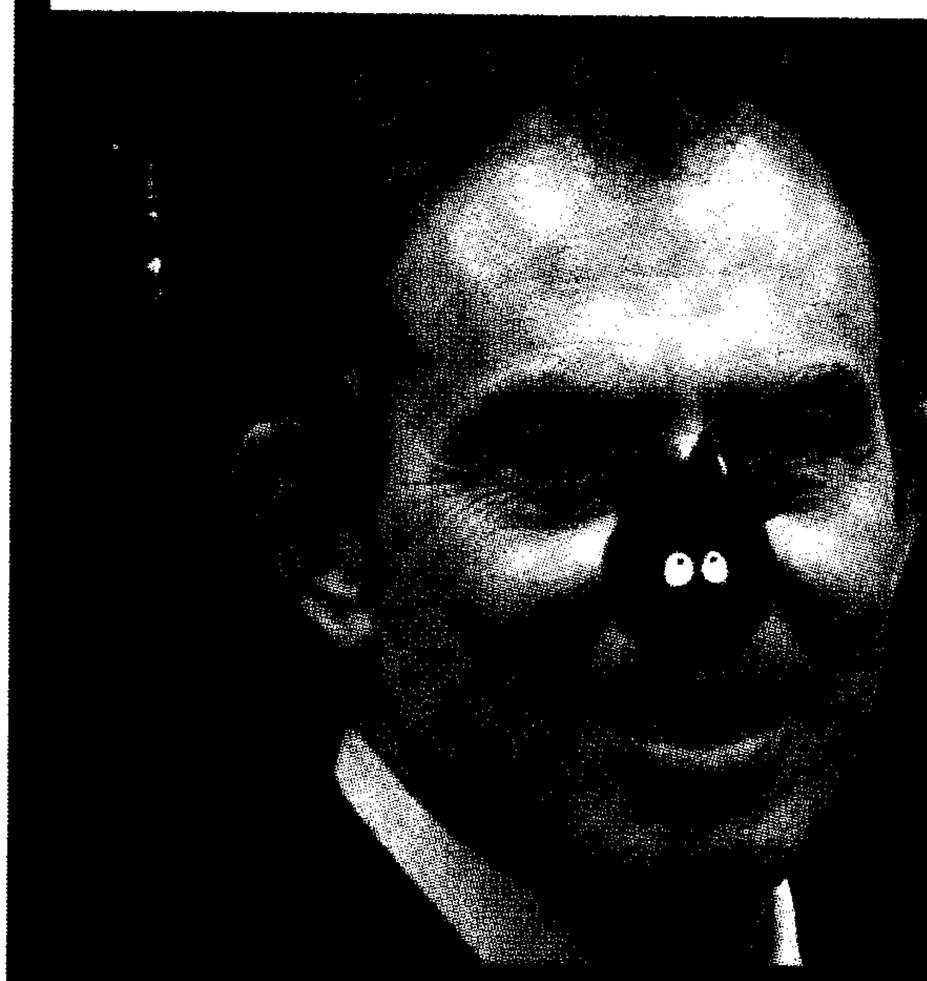
Christopher Howse on "Is Roman Catholicism the new Conrad Black?"

Exclusive interview with Britain's leading Catholic laywoman – St Cheresa of Booth QC.

Yes, it's all in the super soaraway Daily Tabletgraph!



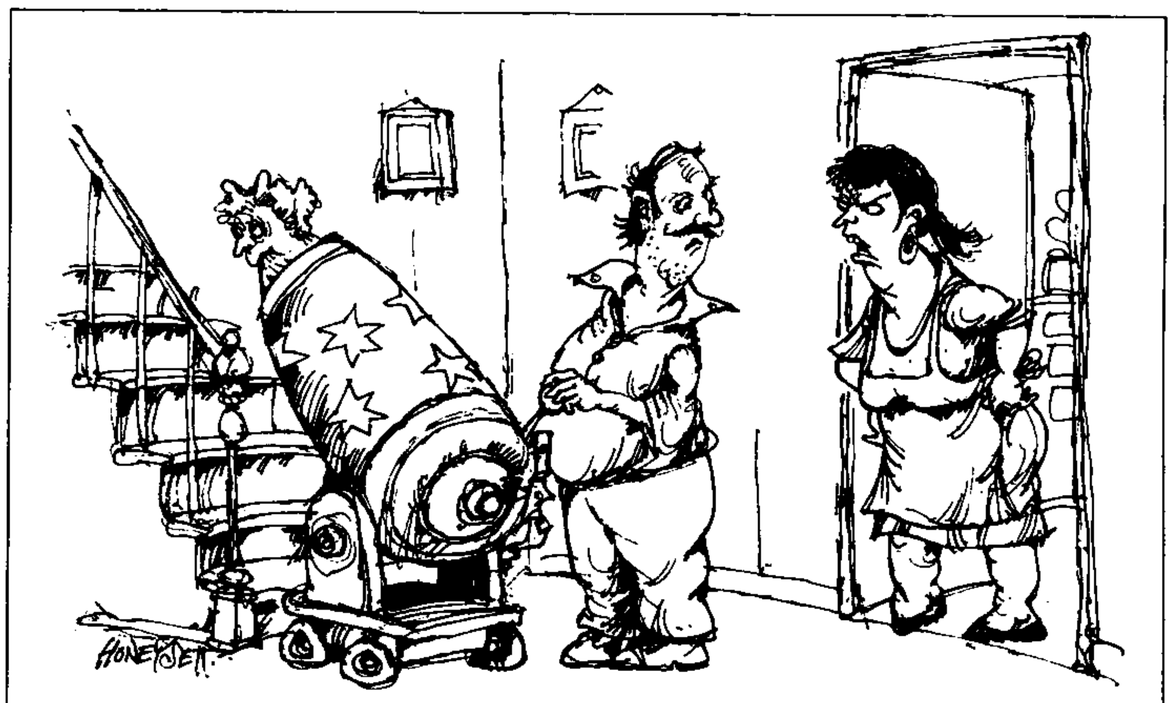
YES! IT'S BROWN NOSE DAY



All your favourite TV stars will be making themselves look even more ridiculous than usual, and it's all for a good cause – world war.

Join funsters Tony Blair, Pete Mandelson, Jackie Straw, Iain Duncan Laugh and a whole host of larger-than-life comedians as they attempt to do silly stunts to raze Baghdad to the ground.

This year's Brown Nose Day promises to be the most spectacular ever, as these comical celebs line up to "brown nose" George Bush!



'You earn good money at the circus, why can't we buy mother a proper stairlift?"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam

So. Farewell
Then
Peterborough*.

Long-running
Diary column in
The Daily Telegraph.

Now no one
Can read you
Any more.

Not that they
Ever did.

E. J. Thribb (17½)

*(*Now to be renamed "London Spy" in exciting new rebranding of the Daily Fallingsalesgraph)*

Those Menus in full

Prince Charles Charity Dinner

Donor Kebab
– ❋ –
Stuffed Wallet
– ❋ –
Turkish Cough-up

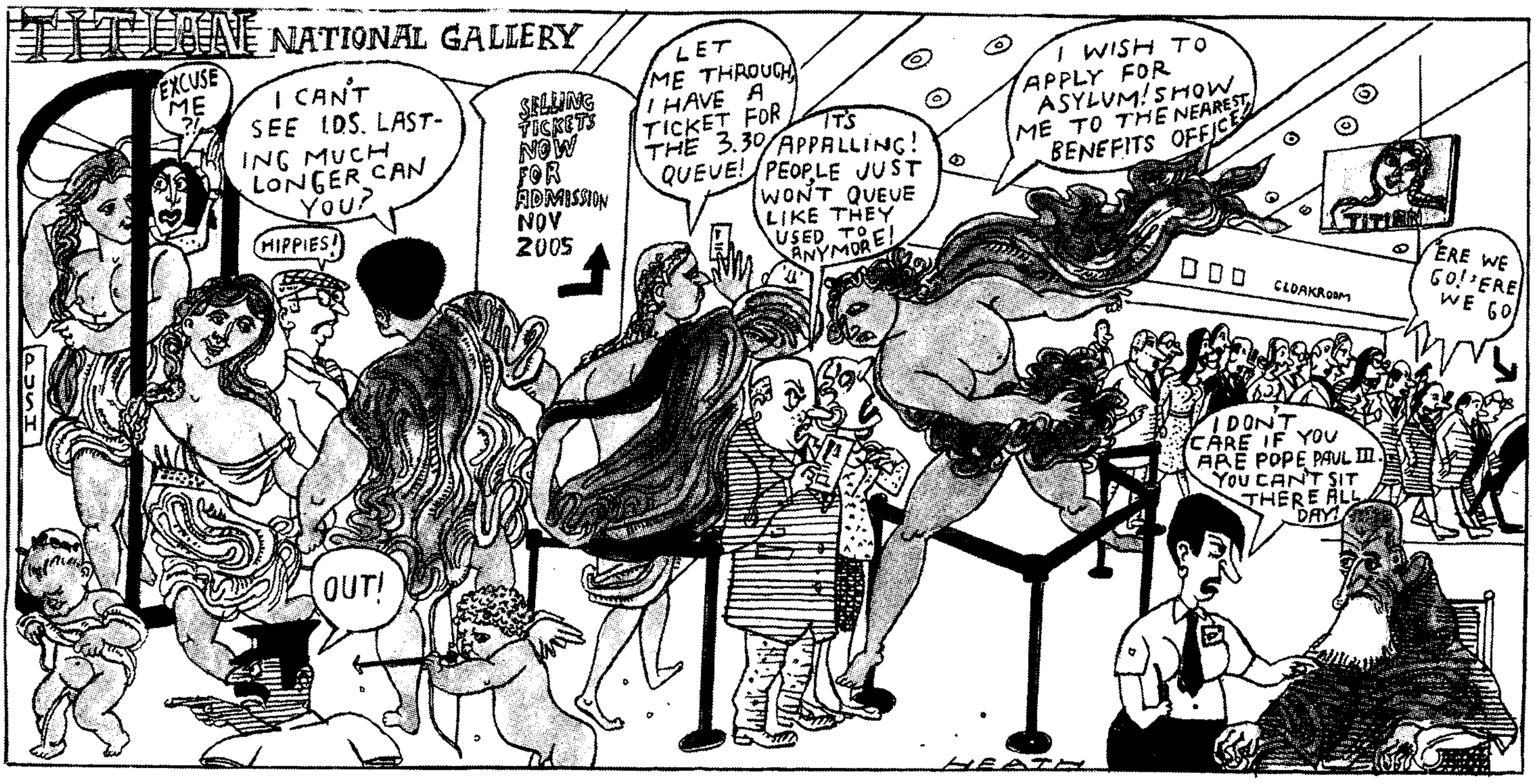
Andy Gilchrist Curry Special

Union Bhaji
– ❋ –
Chicken Jalfreebi
– ❋ –
Cucumber Raithoff

Hannibal Lecter Wedding Breakfast

The Bride

(That's enough menus.Ed.)


TITIBAE NATIONAL GALLERY
EXCUSE ME?!
I CAN'T SEE I.D.S. LASTING MUCH LONGER CAN YOU?
HIPPIES!
OUT!
SELLING TICKETS NOW FOR ADMISSION NOV 2005
LET ME THROUGH, I HAVE A TICKET FOR THE 3.30 QUEUE!
IT'S APPALLING! PEOPLE JUST WON'T QUEUE LIKE THEY USED TO ANYMORE!
I WISH TO APPLY FOR ASYLUM! SHOW ME TO THE NEAREST BENEFITS OFFICE!
TITIAN
CLOAKROOM
'ERE WE GO! 'ERE WE GO
I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE POPE PAUL III. YOU CAN'T SIT THERE ALL DAY!
PUSH
HEATH

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

CAROLE CAPLIN

What part do spoons play in your holistic healing therapy?

I believe that anything that is made of metal can be used as a conduit for energy that drives out toxins. If you hold up a spoon pointing to the magnetic meridian of the body, then a qualified healer, such as myself, can literally cure almost any disease you can think of.

Did you give the prime minister's wife a spoon massage?

My dealings with Cherie are totally confidential. She is a very close personal friend, as is the prime minister, so I cannot possibly comment on that question. But the answer is yes, I've frequently given both of them spoon therapy as part of an Aztec rebirthing ritual. They both loved it, and said afterwards that it had done wonders for their sex life. But more than that I cannot say.

I understand your boyfriend Peter Foster has stolen a number of your spoons. Is that true?

Peter is a lovely man and I am sure, if he did steal my spoons, he had a very good reason for doing so, like he wanted to sell them.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I am getting paid for this, aren't I? I'm fed up with the media trying to exploit my private life. So let's call it 50 grand, shall we?

NEXT WEEK: Michael Fish – *"Me and My Fish."*

Late News

NORTH KOREAN MISSILE CRISIS LATEST

by Our North Korean Correspondent
Kim Dim Sum

THE White House says it is imperative that the free world stands by and does nothing after North Korea's launch of a missile into international waters east of South Korea in direct breach of U.N. resolutions.

"To take action against a savage dictator like Kim Jong Il, who has starved and tortured his own people, simply because his hated regime is running an illegal weapons programme is out of the question," a bemused President Bush told reporters.

"We want to be remembered by our children as the people who did nothing."

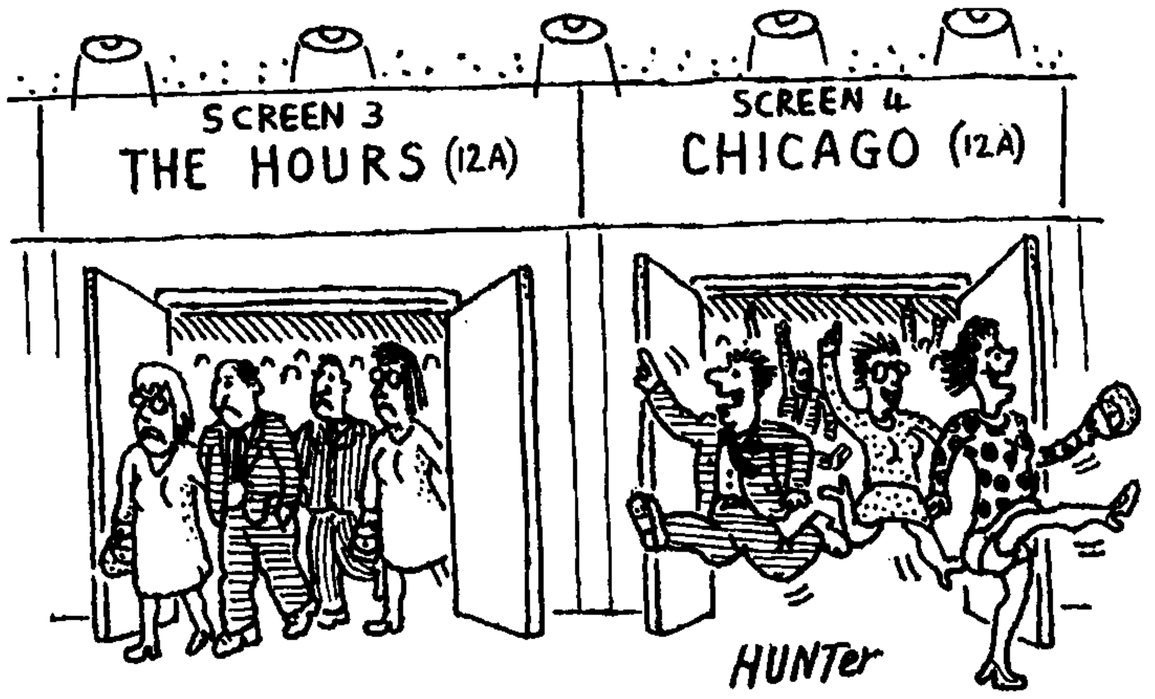
CONGESTION CHARGE LOOPHOLE REVEALED

by Our Transort Correspondent
Charles Three-Wheeler

IT'S BEEN revealed today that countless millions of people in Britain are avoiding paying the £5 Central London Congestion Charge by "not living in London".

"Apparently, what these people are doing is totally legal," said one bemused London journalist, churning out yet another article about the charge. "It simply involves finding somewhere to live and work that isn't in London."

It is thought that despite avoiding the congestion charge, these people "not living in London" will still be penalised by being forced to endure endless supplements and comment pieces about the congestion charge in their morning newspapers, despite the fact it's all taking place hundreds of miles away.



Radio Highlights

The Today Programme

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*:And now Iraq. We have in the studio President George Bush and Saddam Hussein. If I can turn to you first, President Bush, what you're saying basically is – and correct me if I'm wrong – look, Saddam has had twelve years to disarm and this has nothing to do with oil or unfinished business left by your father when he was in the White House...

Bush: I would just like to...

Naughtie: ...because that's the nub of your position, isn't it? You believe that Saddam represents a real threat to world peace, even though there's no evidence of any definite connection with Al Qaeda, and even though the weapons of mass destruction that you've said so much about, haven't been found yet...

Hussein: May I just say...

Naughtie: ...of course, your view is diametrically opposed to that of Mr Bush here. As I understand it, you feel that it is the United States which is engaged in an imperialist adventure, without the support of the international community as expressed through the United Nations...

Bush: Excuse me, Mr Naughtie, could I correct...

Naughtie: ...no, you'll be able to put your side of the case in a minute, but I think we have to let Mr Hussein make his point which, as I see it, is that Resolution 1441 does not in itself authorise...

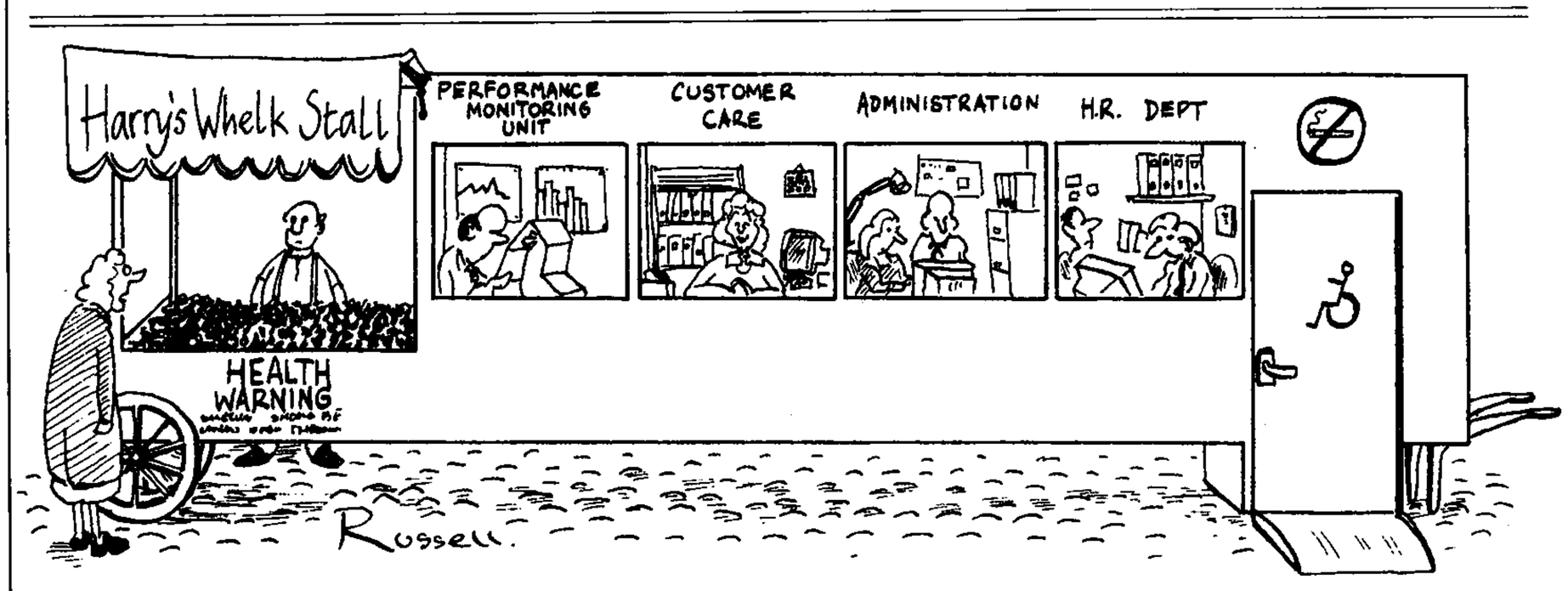
Hussein: Please, Mr Naughtie, you must allow me...

Naughtie: Look, if everyone talks at once, our listeners won't be able to hear the question.

Bush and Hussein *(together)*: What is the question?

Naughtie: Gentlemen, thank you. I'm sorry, that's all we've got time for. And now, Thought For The Day, with His Holiness Shri Hari Enfield, chief guru of the Hari Krishna Temple in Enfield.

Enfield: You know, when I read about the Congestion Charge, I thought "Aren't all our lives suffering from congestion these days?" I know mine is...
(Cont'd. 94 Khz)



"Can I have some whelks, please?"

DIARY

SARA COX

SARA: Y'know when you got this great big sort of bogey thingy up your nostraw and you like widdle it around with your finger but it somehow still won't wosser word, you know, get out? Joonota mean? Right, so you got this great big sort of bogey thingy up your nostraw and you're like going ravin' mad like tryin' to like you know widdle it around with your finger and gerrit out, right, joonota mean? Well, tha happened to me last night, it did, honest, like I was just sittin' there, trying to what's the word, dislodge, yeah, dislodge this bogey but would it come out? No, it wouldn't, I'm tellin' you it wouldn't!!!!!!! Wooh! Mad!

It's 8.46 and comin' up we got the results of an IGSLUSIF interview with Robbie, cwor, don't half fancy Robbie, eh, girls, he ain't half sexeh, wouldn't mind findin' what he's hiding up his trousers, eh, girls, joonota mean? Wooh! ONE LIFE ONE STATION THE RADIO ONE BREAKFAST SHOW.

It's like 8.48 and there's a six mile tailback on the A1039 outside Leicester so let's like hear the news headlines from one guy who's got a lot going on in his trousers – Matt.

MATT: It's boom time all round as President Bush starts dropping his bombs on Saddam Hussein, Posh and Becks say no to war, another schoolgirl is murdered – and a chance to win VIP tickets and mix with top celebs as J.Lo struts her stuff at the UK Premiere of her latest movie. ONE LIFE ONE STATION THE UK'S URFISHL NUMBER ONE – RADIO ONE.

SARA: Like yesterday I had this great big massive wosser word, yeah, need, I had this great big like massive need to have a woddya call it, yeah – POO, right? But I wasn't at home, I was stuck in like this tailback on the M1 I think it was, and I so I'm going, like, I really like need to have this great big massive poo, but where'm I gonna do it, joonota mean? Talk about clenchin' the old buttocks, right?! Anyweh, luckily I made it back just in time and had my poo, like gwah, the relief, you can't belieeeve it, so this got me thinking, right, I want to hear from any of you who've had a similar last minute poo experience, joonota mean? Ahm not necessarily talking 'bout pooin' in your pants, though we must have all done that in our time, joonota mean? But if you got a great poo story that happened to you or your mates then mail me on wwwdotbbcdotcodotukforwardslashradio1 and I'll read out your all-time best poo stories, shoo be great.

Dja watch Fooballer Swives last night, dja? Mandy from Hartlepool just e-mailed to say she don't half fancy that Jason, and she's like pretty sure he's got the biggest willy of the lot of em judging by that BULGE, joonota mean? So I was watching Fooballer Swives last night eating prawn flavour Skips well, to be honest, they weren't prawn flavour Skips they were like Marks and Spencer own-brand prawn flavour skips but like to you and me they were Skips 'cos I know a Skip when I see one. Just got an e-mail from Dave in Totnes saying he once had a poo in a shower at his auntie's house, thanks for that, Dave, and another from Sue from Guildford who goes I once had a poo on the verge of the M4 outside Newbury and like it was SO EM-BARRASSING, right, 'cos this lorry driver sticks his head out of his lorry and sees her havin' a poo right there on the verge, that's the M4 outside Newbury, this massive poo, right? Gray story, Sue!

Teya what, this Iraq business right, like, this whole Iraq thing, joonota mean, like last night I'm like watching the news with Trevor McDonald, sexy guy, Trev, crackin', and I'm like watching the news about the Iraq thing, and I'm thinkin' now, the big debate comes down to this: if I had to, would I rather snog George Bush or Saddam Hoodjamaflip? Tricky one. I mean, like, I'd probably rather go clubbin' with Saddam, 'cos, like he's got that wosser word that's right moustache and everything and he looks kind of mean and broodeh, but for a serious snog I'm not so sure I might not go for George Bush he's got skin like a baby's bum and I bet he'd be up for a bitta toe-suckin'! E-mail uz now with your opinion on the big issue – whoodja wanna snog most, Bush or Saddam? Now let's go to Matt for an update of the latest world news wotsit from Radio 1!

MATT: Millions perish as nuclear bomb blows top country to smithereens – traffic build up due to overturned lorry on the A12 outside Chelmsford – the tortoise who can't stop farting – and Mel C says no to the Spice Girls! All this and more coming up on Newsbeat.

SARA: Wossat about fartin', Matt, dja say summat about fartin'?

MATT: There's a tortoise who can't stop farting, Sara.

SARA: A tortoise who can't stop fartin'. Blimey! Cheeky sod! Just think – a tortoise who can't stop fartin'. Wodya say it was, Matt?

MATT: A tortoise who can't stop farting, Sara!

SARA: Sounds like yours truleh after I've had like all the Baked Beans, joonota mean?!!! Come on you lot out there, I bet you got some gray fartin' stories for us – e-mail them in and we'll give the winner a VIP night out at Stringfellows where you'll get to mix with all the real mega celebs, right. Wooh!

Dja see EastEnders then last night dja, I mean like I was going like, wossis – that lad's gorra nice bum on him, wouldn't mind a birrava nibble on that, joonota mean? E-mail just in from Kate from Birmingham who says I always fart after a hot curry and so does my boyfriend Tim and another from Greg from Wisbech who goes he was once like caught short on the B3136 outside Shepton Mallet and he found himself havin' to do a poo into a Coke can, wooh, too much information, Greg, then there's another from Trev from Greenock in Scotland, och aye the noo, who says just 'cos a nuclear bomb's gone and bin dropped on a foreign country no one's ever 'eard of that's no reason not to boogy along to Toad Rappaz incorporating DJ Stunted who he says are like the greatest band that's ever bin of all time in the world ever and they're playing a gig tomorrow night at the Empire in Glasgow, hoots mon there's a moos in the hoos, joonota mean? It's comin' up to 8.55 and there's still an hour to go on Coxie's Breakfast on wosser word Radio 1.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

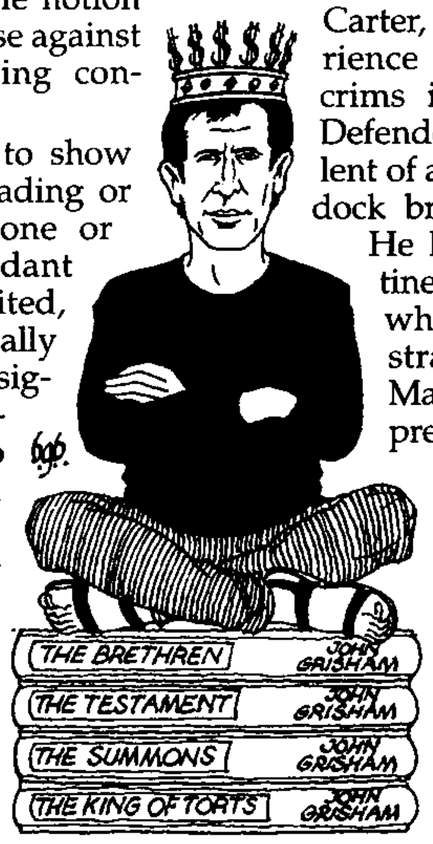
WALKING WITH ALL THOSE OTHER PEOPLE TO PROTEST ABOUT THE WAR WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE...
IT WAS EXHAUSTING OF COURSE BUT I REALLY FELT I WAS DOING MY BIT FOR WORLD PEACE.
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE ON THE MARCH, DEBS...
I WASN'T...
...I WAS ON THE CATWALK, SILLY... LONDON FASHION WEEK...
FASHION TRIUMPH
STOP WAR BLAIR OUT
OH. THAT. YEAH.

Literary Review

No class act

The King of Torts
John Grisham
(Century, £16.99)

IN THE MIDST of reading Grisham's latest, a denunciation of the American system of class action damages claims, I began to entertain the agreeable notion of pursuing such a case against a negligent publishing conglomerate.



One would have to show that, as a result of reading or attempting to read one or more of the defendant company's under-edited, over-hyped and generally miss-sold products, a significant class of plaintiffs had been bored to death or had suffered severe mental injury, post-lectic stress disorder, etc, leaving them or their dependants seriously out of pocket. Greedy lawyers would locate this class of plaintiffs through aggressive advertising and would then force the defendant publishers and their insurers to settle for a massive sum, lest they suffer the even worse fate of a punitive damages verdict from a lottery-minded jury. The plaintiffs would all have signed waivers entitling the lawyers to settle for anything above a risible minimum, and the main point of contention in the negotiations would be how much the lawyers' cut should be. (Genteel literary agents on 15 per cent or less look away now: we're talking 30 per cent, minimum.) The lawyers would then swan off in their private jets while their paralegals cold-called some more potential plaintiffs.

Okay, so it couldn't happen here. And to be fair, the grosser abuses of the system in the States are not so frequent or so gross that calls for reform cannot fairly easily be brushed aside by well-placed donations to presidential campaigns. But this, in essence, is the world depicted in Grisham's fifteenth novel.

I hesitate to call it a thriller, for fear of being sued: it has many faults but being thrilling isn't one of them. However his publishers can legitimately banner it "his new bestseller". Selling over 27,000 copies in its first week, it sits smugly enthroned at the top of the hardback fiction chart.

Unlike the reckless pharmaceutical giants who get sued in the book, the publishers can at least claim that their product's formula has been tried and tested. There are, so to speak, precedents. The little guy who stumbles on the big conspiracy. The mysterious stranger who for motives that are not immediately clear offers help, advice and money. The secret so potent that huge sums of money are paid to keep it under wraps. The little guy's overnight success. The way it corrupts him and makes him no better than his envious, dethroned rivals. The road to riches becomes the road to ruin. The same newspapers who front-paged the hero's rise now eagerly cover his fall. As with a well-tested drug, the punter knows what to expect and may even believe that it's doing some good.

In this case the little guy is Clay Carter, who has five years' experience of defending indigent crims in the Office of Public Defender (roughly the equivalent of a duty solicitor, or the old dock brief) in Washington DC. He has just taken on a routinely senseless murder case when the mysterious stranger, calling himself Max Pace, turns up with a preposterous story about an ill-tested detox wonderdrug that turns former addicts into zombie-like killers. The manufacturer wants it all hushed up and for some reason Clay is to be moulded to the task. He abandons his client, sets up as a civil lawyer and gets a massive cut of the hush money he's paid to dole out.

Next thing, the same unidentified company wants Clay to sue its big rivals using secret leaked reports of another ill-tested wonderdrug. He expands his firm, marshalls his plaintiffs, negotiates a massive settlement and is crowned the King of Torts. He acquires the obligatory private jet to impress his new tort lawyer friends and a trophy model girlfriend to annoy the snooty heiress who jilted him. He forgets his clients and thinks only of the money. But his disgruntled clients haven't forgotten him and he soon finds himself on the receiving end of the mass-tort claim that finally ruins him.

Never mind that the rapidly expanding firm of lawyers never seems to probe into who is funding their risky litigation or why they are being used in this way. Never mind that despite their front page fame they seem to attract no other business than the cases passed on to them by Max or Clay's new buddies. Never mind that Clay, a criminal lawyer, seems unaware that dealing in the stock of a company he is busy suing might be construed as insider dealing. Never mind that many of the other details are somewhat ludicrous and unbelievable. This is fiction, right?

Maybe. But according to the "author's note" at the end, when fiction "ventures near the truth, it needs to be accurate." Quite so. Especially if you're an ex-lawyer making loads of money by complaining about how lawyers are making loads of money through an iniquitous system of grossly over-hyped claims.

Books & Bookmen

■ DISCOUNTS on books sold in the high street and online have increased alarmingly in recent years, in the name of building market share.

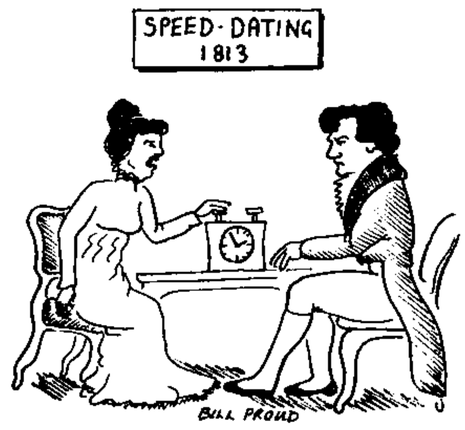
The whole process may have gone too far, though, if the publication of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in June is anything to go by. Bloomsbury has made it quite clear to booksellers that there will be no extra discounts. Independents will receive their usual 35 per cent off the £16.99 cover price, and the likes of WH Smug will receive around 50 per cent.

So far, so fair, and Ottakar's have already started taking orders for the book at £11.99, which reduces their margin considerably. *The Bookseller* worked out that it would take 188 per cent more copies than they would have had to sell at full price to receive the same revenue. Even so, a profit of sorts is being made. Now, however, Amazon.co.uk is offering a full 50 per cent off the book, while Tesco.com is punting it out at 55 per cent off. Even assuming that both get the same terms as Smugs, Amazon will be breaking even, while Tesco will actually be making a loss. What price now market share?

■ IN HER new book *Hard Work*, prosperous *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee tells how she went undercover last year to spend a few weeks working among the proles in low-paid jobs, before returning to her "comfortable Victorian home" to write about it.

Toynbee wrote a very similar book, *A Working Life*, more than 30 years ago. But, as she explained in a recent interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, she was inspired to repeat the experiment by "a letter from Church Action on Poverty, challenging her to live on the minimum wage for Lent".

Obviously, then, the inspiration didn't come from *Nickel and Dimed*, a bestseller written by the American journalist Barbara Ehrenreich two years ago.



"I don't like your pride, Mr Darcy" "I don't like your prejudice, Miss Bennet" *"Time's up!"*

Ehrenreich spent a few months, er, working among the proles before returning to her lavish pad to write about it. And the British edition of *Nickel and Dimed* had an introduction by... Polly Toynbee.

Nevertheless, comparisons are bound to be made, as indeed they were in the *Grauniad*'s own review of Toynbee's *Hard Work* two weeks ago. The review, by American writer JoAnn Wypijewski, was largely positive and sympathetic – but it did mention *en passant* that "Ehrenreich's book is different, and better". Farringdon Road is still trembling from the aftershock of the seismic fury this provoked in Toynbee and her loyal editor, Alan Rusbridger.

■ NOT SINCE Zadie Smith has a first novelist had such rave reviews as Sarah Sands, author of the new chick-lit romp *Playing the Game*.

"The novel burns itself into the memory," concluded an awestruck David Robson in the *Sunday Telegraph*. A N Wilson's review in the *Daily Telegraph* began by describing the book as a "sprightly comedy", but then had second thoughts – "positively Swiftian...the plotting is exquisite...it is a *Scoop* for our time...deftly brilliant...every page sings."

The *Spectator*, bizarrely, chose Simon Heffer to assess Ms Sands's literary debut. Despite confessing his ignorance about "what I am told are known as 'shopping and fucking' novels", Hefferlump was enraptured by the "wit", "subtlety" and indeed "humanity" of this book. "Entirely literate and beautifully written...*Playing the Game* is great fun, but also the signal of no mean popular literary talent."

All these enviable raves appeared in publications owned by the Telegraph group – where the brilliant Sarah Sands herself works, by happy chance, as deputy editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and employer of columnists such as A N Wislon. By another happy chance, she is godmother to one of Heffer's children.

'Bookworm'

IN THE BACK

BONDED WAREHOUSE SCAM

IN THE LINE OF DUTY

USING "grasses" to catch criminals is a tricky business. There is always the chance that the grasses themselves may have been up to no good. In the murky world supervised by HM Customs such people are known as "participating informants". If their information is to be taken seriously by courts, they have to be registered, and defence lawyers have to be told about them.

This was the basic problem in the unimaginably expensive "London City Bond" cases that finally petered out last month. Over a period of nearly four years, a long string of convicted tax cheats and smugglers walked free on appeal because the prosecution had not disclosed that the evidence against them had been collected from undisclosed participating informants who were encouraging the fraud and taking part in it.

For several years after 1998, HM Customs prosecuted people for what an appeal judge called "massive fraud" that deprived the Revenue of at least £668m. A long series of convictions crawled slowly to the Court of Appeal, where they were systematically quashed. The cheats and smugglers pocketed their ill-gotten gains, since even the orders forcing them to compensate for their crimes have been cancelled. The reason for these acquittals is simple. HM Customs blithely refused to follow basic rules about participating informants.

London City Bond was a bonded warehouse for storing goods, mainly whisky. Duty on the whisky didn't have to be paid while it stayed in the warehouse or while it was transported to another warehouse. In charge of the warehouse were two brothers, Edward and Alfred Allington. For at least two years before 1998, the Allington brothers co-operated with Customs chief investigating officer Bernie Small. They helped him build up a case against several suppliers and hauliers who pretended that they were transporting whisky to another bonded warehouse, but were in fact selling it on for sale in off-licences and avoiding duty. Neither the defence lawyers nor the judges were told that the brothers were "participating informants". Long and expensive trials ended usually in convictions, and it was not until after the trials that the defendants realised that the brothers had participated in the scams, encouraged them and even benefited from them. It was only when the prosecution was forced rather shamefacedly to admit the extent of the brothers' involvement that the cases finally collapsed.

At the beginning of the process, on 17 October 1996, Alfred Allington asked for a pledge that in exchange for his giving information about criminals, his warehouse would not be prosecuted for consistently breaking the law. The pledge came, effectively, in a letter from the customs officer in charge of the case, Mr R.J. Snugg. The Court of Appeal described the letter as a "masterpiece of obfuscation", but its meaning nevertheless was clear. The warehouse was above the law. So, day after day, for at least two years, the Allingtons continued to tell Customs about the crooked activities of their customers in the comfortable certainty that they themselves were safe from prosecution. They made full use of this immunity. In his evidence Edward Allington said he and his brother were frequently paid "sweeteners" by customers. How much was paid in these bribes? The Court of Appeal said a "considerable amount" but no one, not even Customs, knew how much.

During all the long, complicated trials the juries never heard that the Allington brothers were participating informants. They never heard of the friendship between one of the Allingtons and Michael Villiers, a man who grew enormously rich on the proceeds of his duty-dodging from LCB, and who was described by the Court of Appeal as the "principal orchestrator and financier of the fraud". They never heard of the lies told under oath by the Allingtons to cover their tracks at various hearings connected with the case. They never heard of the bonded warehouse specially set up by Customs, with the knowledge of the Allingtons, to trap the dodgers, and they never knew the extent to which the Allington brothers participated in the crimes they were meant to be exposing.

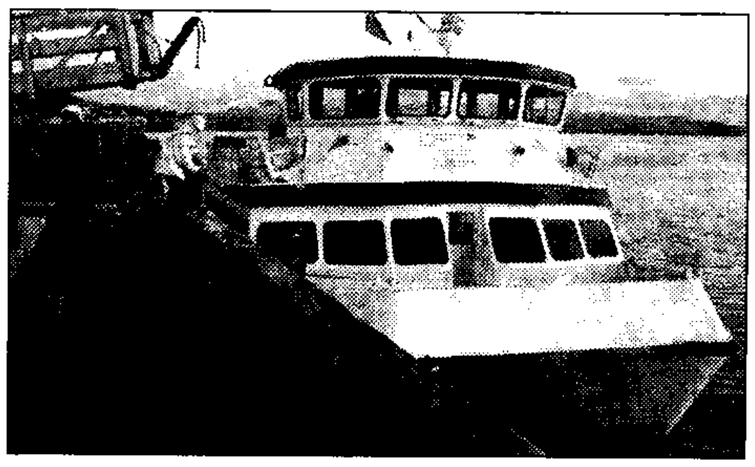
When the facts about the Allingtons and their real role started to emerge, the convicted cheats appealed. At least 20 defendants have since been released, their convictions quashed with costs awarded to their lawyers and all enforcement orders against them quashed as well. Customs and Excise told the Eye that the prosecution costs in all the cases came to just over £8m, and that doesn't include the vast legal aid bills for almost all the defendants nor any of the money lost in wiped-out fines and confiscations. All in all, the loss to the Exchequer from this monumental disaster could approach a billion pounds. Mr Snugg, by the way, has retired. Mr Small is still employed by Customs and Excise.

FERRY SAFETY

GOUROCK AND A HARD PLACE

THE FERRY from Gourock to Dunoon on the mouth of the Clyde in the West of Scotland is a vital resource for the people of both areas, and for the whole of Argyllshire.

For many years the route has been contested by Caledonian MacBrayne, which runs one ferry with a government subsidy, and Western Ferries, a private company favoured by Scottish civil servants, which runs another. Various attempts have been made to cut down the Cal-Mac service to give a free run to Western Ferries.



CATAMARAN: smashed into pier

Last year, Cal-Mac, always willing to oblige the Scottish Office, agreed to replace its car ferry service with a passengers-only catamaran. For weeks there were complaints from passengers – not just about the end of the car service, but also about the safety of the catamaran, especially when docking at Dunoon. These complaints were airily waved aside by Cal-Mac, by the Health and Safety Executive, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and by the Department of Transport in London.

Then on 16 January, in heavy seas, the catamaran, with 28 passengers on board, docked precariously at Dunoon. Two passengers managed to get off, but the catamaran smashed into the pier twice and rope holding the gangway broke. A passenger on the gangway was hauled to safety by the crew. One woman, Mrs Letitia McArthur, who was waiting to disembark with her baby daughter, told her MP: "People all round us were screaming. They were absolutely terrified." The catamaran turned round and went back to Gourock, where the passengers were stranded.

At the Scottish Grand Committee of the House of Commons last month, the Lib-Dem MP for Argyll and Bute, Alan Reid, demanded a public inquiry, but was told by Jim Murphy, Labour MP for Eastwood, that there was no chance.

MILKING THE TAXPAYER

Alice in Blunderland

THE MOST common defence of PFI by Chancellor Gordon Brown is that it "shifts the risk" from the taxpayers to private companies. When something goes wrong, he explained in a recent *Newsnight* interview, the private company, not the taxpayer, takes the hit.

A good example is the pioneer of New Labour's PFI projects, the sale of £370m worth of tax and customs buildings to Mapeley Steps, a company made up of millionaires based in a tax haven. In November 2001, only eight months after the contract was signed, the company started to complain that they hadn't made enough public money out of it. So impressed were the Inland Revenue by the Chancellor's explanation that risks in PFI contracts had to be met by the private sector that they promptly set up a working group of top accountants (Deloitte and Touche) and solicitors (Lovells) to "ensure a careful and professional analysis of Mapeley's position".

In February last year, the group decided they hadn't got enough expert advice so they hired (at public expense) an expensive investment bank, Rothschilds, to help them with the figures. Rothschilds "stressed the serious consequences for the tax and Customs departments of the contract coming to a premature end". Tax and Customs bosses saw at once that they were over a barrel and that "without a settlement there was a risk that Mapeley might fail financially".

On 25 June last year Customs and tax bosses called for more research on how they could increase the payments to the company for the next three years. At another meeting in July, the same bosses were reminded that Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo had twice "expressed strong reservations about paying increased amounts to Mapeley", but the working group and Rothschilds blithely went ahead with discussions about how much more public money should go to Mapeley.

"Letters of comfort" went off at once from the government to reassure Mapeley's bankers. The letters enabled Mapeley's auditors (Arthur Andersen) to declare Mapeley solvent when they weren't. The *Eye* understands on very good authority that Mapeley are gleefully preparing their case for a further handout from the taxpayer of £17m. The codename of the new scheme is likely to be Project Alice, presumably after the well-known saying, "Pass the sick-bag, Alice."

●In his introduction to the recent National Audit Office report on the work of the Inland Revenue in combating fraud, the NAO's chief Sir John Bourn KCB remarks: "The use of offshore accounts and structures to commit tax fraud is of particular concern." Tactfully, he made no reference to the Inland Revenue's own use of offshore accounts and structures in order to sell its own buildings to tax-avoiding millionaires in Bermuda. *Eye* readers will recall that in its accounts for 2001 the Inland Revenue falsely pretended that the company to which it sold the buildings was a British-registered company. It wasn't, of course, and top Revenue officials have all apologised for what they call a "cock-up". But wait. Had this Sir John Bourn anything to do with the Sir John Bourn who, as Comptroller and Auditor General, signed off the deceptive Inland Accounts as an accurate record of what really happened? And what action is he planning to take against the Inland Revenue for such blatant deceit?

AIRPORTS

PIE IN THE SKY

THE GOVERNMENT'S new consultation paper on aviation expansion – republished because the original omitted Gatwick as an option – shows all the same signs of being researched and approved by airport giants, BAA plc. And BAA already enjoys virtual monopoly of London's airports – 93 per cent of passengers.

Despite the disbelief and criticism of residents and environmentalists which greeted the first version published last year, no attempt has been made to adjust dodgy travel projections – even though the airline industry is in crisis and numbers of people flying are likely to decrease further in the event of war.

The new series of green papers – seven, covering each region – repeats the dubious assertion that demand for air travel will leap from the current level of around 181 million passengers to 500 million by 2030. Supposedly based on independent analysis, it bears an uncanny similarity to figures produced by BAA last year. The south-east accounts for 60 per cent of UK air travel. Transport ministers suggest demand will rise by 3.7 per cent to 301 million in 2030. BAA's annual report contains almost an identical assumption.

Hardly surprising since the transport department's forecast is based on a regional study prepared by BAA – and submitted to the department for environment, transport and the regions in April 2001.

Happily for BAA, the favoured options, ranging from a third runway at Heathrow to two new ones each at Stansted and Gatwick, require massive expansion at its airports.

Despite its unparalleled monopoly BAA gets an easy ride in Parliament. Could this be in any way related to the free parking it offers all politicians? Such "rover" tickets would normally be sold for more than £1,300. Over £1.1m worth of parking permits a year have been given to 475 MPs, 313 lords and 77 MEPs – representing about half of all gifts declared in the members' register. BAA does not declare these as a political donation because it claims says its favours are offered to members of all political parties.

HEATHROW POLLUTION

MURKY WATERS

BAA, "the world's leading airport company", has been accused of discharging polluted waste from Heathrow airport into a lake used by water skiers. There are fears that an adjoining lake used by a local girls' school may also have been contaminated.

Two years ago highly toxic cadmium, lead and oil, and high levels of suspended solids, were found in two lots of water samples taken from Princes Lake, near Ashford, by Friends of the Earth and anti-airport expansion campaigners Hacan Clear Skies.

But while BAA maintains its present water sampling reveals no such pollution, the company is about to dredge thousands of tonnes of silt from the bottom of lake, which it does admit is contaminated. The silt is so contaminated with carcinogenic cadmium, other heavy metals and hydrocarbons that the Environment Agency has ordered that filtering curtains be erected around the dredging area to prevent dispersing the muck further into the lake. It also requires the silt to be suitably treated before it is used in the construction of Terminal 5 – as BAA proposes.

Last week environmental health officers from Spelthorne borough council asked BAA to provide a detailed human health assessment risk.

For a number of years BAA have been permitted by the Environment Agency to discharge into Princes Lake – little more than 100 metres from the ski-lanes — via a drainage pit where it is supposed to be cleaned of all contaminants from fuel, de-icers and other run-off waste. All that appears to protect those using the lake are two rubber booms and a bunch of filtering water reeds. Indeed last week an oily slick could clearly be seen floating on the lake between the discharge pipes and the first boom. BAA maintains that this shows the boom works.

A BAA spokesman said that as well as regular monitoring now showing no higher levels of pollutants in the lake than in any other "urban run-off" area, Princes Lake supported large numbers of healthy fish, plant and bird-life. Further, there had never been any complaints from members of the ski-club. BAA had always worked with the Environment Agency and had embarked on a £20m scheme to guarantee water quality – one part of which was the dredging. The EA confirmed it was happy with BAA's actions.

But environmentalists are concerned that pollution may already have spread into adjoining St David's Lake and into the ground water – none of which has been tested.

PRISONERS ABROAD

LEFT TO ROT

THE GOVERNMENT'S enduring dedication to the United Nations and resolutions passed by UN bodies is handsomely illustrated by their reaction to the appalling case of George Atkinson.

The basic facts were set out in Eye 953, back in June 1998. Mr Atkinson, a landscape architect, who designed and built golf courses in the Gulf sheikhdom of Dubai, was arrested in March 1997, tried on highly dubious, and bitterly contested, charges of fraud, and sent to prison for six years. He was at first allowed bail, but even when he met the conditions he was not released. His case was investigated by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. In a strong judgement, in September 1998, the group announced: "The deprivation of liberty of George Atkinson is arbitrary, as being in direct contravention of articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and articles 36, 37, 38 and 39 of the body of principles for the protection of all persons under any form of detention or imprisonment."

The group asked the Dubai government to remedy the situation by releasing Mr Atkinson. The government of Dubai – a feudal sheikhdom that shows no interest whatever in the views of its citizens or any others – paid not the slightest attention. Mr Atkinson served three-quarters of his sentence – which would normally have ensured his release – but was still kept in prison. In another judgement last year, the UN group once again denounced his detention. It was made even worse, they declared, by the refusal to release him after he had served three-quarters of his sentence. The reaction of the sheikhdom has been to keep Mr Atkinson in prison even after he had finished his full six-year sentence in February. The British government, while it sends more than half its army to enforce a UN resolution on Iraq, does nothing at all to assist Mr Atkinson and his family or to ensure that the recommendations of the UN working group on his arbitrary detention are carried out.

Atkinson

On probation

THE TRUE costs of privatisation are normally kept secret as New Labour and its new friends in big business hide behind "commercial or contract confidentiality".

But thanks to a detailed survey of its branches round the country by the probation union Napo, the cost to the taxpayer of the relentless privatisation drive has been revealed. For example, the costs of maintaining the probation buildings and offices in Lancashire last year, before privatisation, were just over £500,000. This year, in business hands, the costs will nearly treble to over £1.3m. In Staffordshire costs are doubling from £700,000 to £1.4m; in Merseyside from £1.8m to £2.8m; in West Yorkshire from £2m to £3.5m. In fact only one or two branches reveal any kind of small-scale savings over the public sector.

With the selling-off of the cooks, cleaners and gardeners the hike in charges – often for a far inferior service – is even more outrageous. Most hostels are having to pay an average of £50,000 to £60,000 a year more; Avon and Somerset will pay £440,000 – up from £125,000. Hampshire costs will rocket from £180,000 to £460,000.

Which is all good news for Morrison Construction Limited and Mitie Group plc, which won the contracts. But bad news for the taxpayer – and indeed the criminal justice system. The privatisation costs are so eating into the branch budgets that it leaves them little or nothing with which to expand their services to cope with the new range of community penalties which the government hopes will keep offenders out of our already full-to-exploding prisons.

The government response to this crisis in the criminal justice system is to throw yet more money into the prison building business. The treasury last week agreed some £200m for more prisons and expansion at others. They will be built and managed by the private sector. And of course we will not know what we are getting for our money, because the deals will all be protected by commercial confidentiality.

Pearson insight

THE BBC's latest commercial adventure is the "online digital curriculum service for schools", recently awarded to the corporation by culture minister Tessa Jowell and to be financed by £150m of licence-payers' money. The service will include Flash animation, interactive games and other wonders of the age.

If the director-general is seriously interested in helping schoolchildren, however, why not allot the money to improving the quality of kids' television?

As it is, about 35 per cent of the BBC's budget for digital curriculum will go to joint-ventures with Pearson Education, a subsidiary of Pearson plc.

After submitting its proposal to the Department of Culture last May, the BBC was legally obliged not to spend any more licence-fee money on the scheme until Jowell announced her decision. But in fact it spent another £60,000, partly on consultancy reports, and continued to negotiate commercial partnerships with Pearson, as a High Court judicial review discovered. Claire Riley, acting director of the BBC's curriculum project, resigned at the end of January – as did Michael Stevenson, the corporation's "head of factual and learning", who said "I made an error of judgment. As a consequence I have decided to leave the BBC, taking responsibility for what happened." Despite his admission, Stevenson collected a pay-off of more than £100,000.

How much did Greg Dyke himself know about the BBC's "impermissible" dealings with Pearson? After Stevenson's departure, the corporation stressed that although Dyke had corresponded with Dame Marjorie Scardino, boss of Pearson plc, he was "peripheral to the matter and there was no impropriety". The statement omitted one interesting detail, however: before being appointed director-general of the BBC in January 2000, Greg Dyke was chief executive of... Pearson Television.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

REGULATORY radar screens on both sides of the Atlantic continue to detect signs of interesting activity by Merton Securities, a little known but intriguing corporate advisor which specialises in some of the more exotic regions of the securities business.

Merton, after years in the eponymous area of south-west London, moved to an address near Marble Arch and has now moved on to Wimbledon. There, run by former banker Brian Jelley, it somewhat unusually has an unlisted telephone number.

Although registered since the Eighties with the Securities & Futures Authority Merton appears to do little business in Britain – the SFA imprimatur, however, is useful for the business that it does do overseas.

There it is more often found in deals involving small, speculative US companies, especially involving share issues to non-US investors – the so called Regulation S offerings – or Regulation D small private placements which can be sold in the US. Mostly these companies, when listed, are to be found on the Nasdaq bulletin board kerb market.

In 2001 all of Merton's £188,000 turnover came from the US. Last year more than half of a reduced £126,000 take came from Sri Lanka, with smaller contributions from Australia and the UK – just £21,000.

Despite this small UK presence Merton has remained of interest to the SFA and its successor regulator the Financial Services Authority – largely because of the deals in which its name appears and the names with which it has been associated.

Deals such as the 1996 plan to float the Belgian-based but Russian mob controlled Kremlyovskaya vodka business in London and New York. This fell through after police in Antwerp raided the Kremlyovskaya offices and the Russian mob links were revealed. More recently Merton's name has surfaced in connection with an internet gaming business targeted by US securities regulators for offering shares to investors in breach of local laws. It is currently involved in a proposal to inject a satellite-based broadband telecom business whose shareholders include the Murdoch empire into a "shell" company run by a former McDonalds manager.

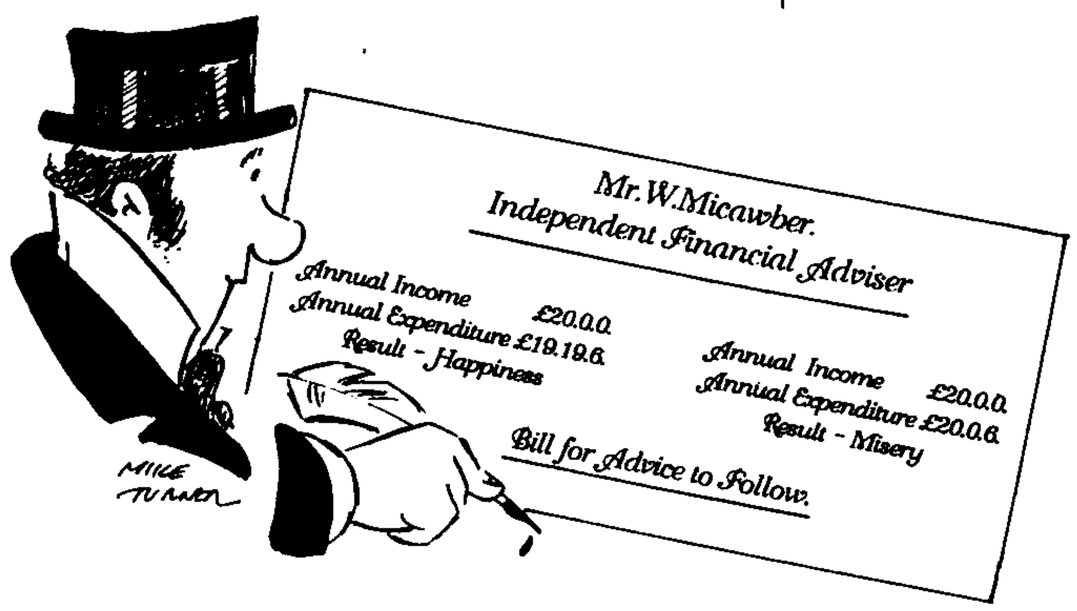
Along the way Merton and Jelley have also found themselves in some fast company. Names such as discredited City dealmaker and one-time Tory councillor Andrew Greystoke, whose law firm has provided services and shared addresses, plus Monaco financier Brian Copsey and polo-playing Alex Dann.

Kremlyovskaya was the brainchild of a group of Russian businessmen headed by Riccardo Fanchini and Yakov Tilipman. Russian organised crime experts in Antwerp – a major centre for the Red Mafia – identified the Polish-born Fanchini as an associate of the crime group headed by Vyacheslav "Japonchik" Ivankov sent to run Russian mob operations in the US.

Before it crashed into bankruptcy in 1996 Kremlyovskaya had made a big splash through sponsoring fashion shows, tennis and polo tournaments and a Formula One racing team.

Jelley was involved in arrangements whereby the Kremlyovskaya business was to have been injected into a Nasdaq listed "shell", Asia Media Communications. Merton was engaged to form and administer certain offshore companies which were part of the ownership structure for the overseas sales of the Russian vodka. Jelley was closely involved in the AMC deal.

Also part of those arrangements was Alex Dann. Dann was prosecuted by the Serious Farce Office over his involvement with Australian share promoter Malcolm Johnson in the gold mining bust Duralite. Charges against Dann and Johnson were thrown out by the trial judge in 1993.



Another part of the Kremlyovskaya plan was for the UK sales rights to be acquired by Greenhills, an AIM listed themed restaurant company promoted by Copsey. Dealings in the bankrupt Greenhills were suspended in 1996 and the Stock Exchange censured the company a year later for not disclosing the collapse of the vodka deal.

Fanchini was jailed for two years, mostly suspended, for bankruptcy fraud in 1999. The Kremlyovskaya brand is now owned and marketed by unrelated interests.

The Belgian authorities were keen to interview Jelley as a witness. However, they maintained he was unco-operative. They were also interested in Merton's dealings with other Antwerp-based Russians. No doubt Jelley would have been only too happy to help if required by the UK authorities who made no such request and anyway he, like Dann and Copsey, knew nothing of the organised crime connections of his clients or their fraudulent intentions.

A year ago Merton Securities popped up in a prominent "tombstone" advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* for 711.TV, an internet gaming business which claimed offices in New York, Florida and London. 711 announced it had appointed the London concern as its advisor. Subsequently US investors were solicited with a prospectus and other material featuring the names of Merton and listing Jelley as a supposed 711.TV director. None of that appears to have been true. Merton's and Jelley's names were somehow used without their consent.

In September last year securities regulators in Missouri issued a cease and desist order against 711.TV and two directors including president Liam Hutchinson for selling unregistered securities. Internet gaming is illegal in Missouri. Hutchinson is based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, an area much favoured by stock promoters including some with which Merton has done business in the past.

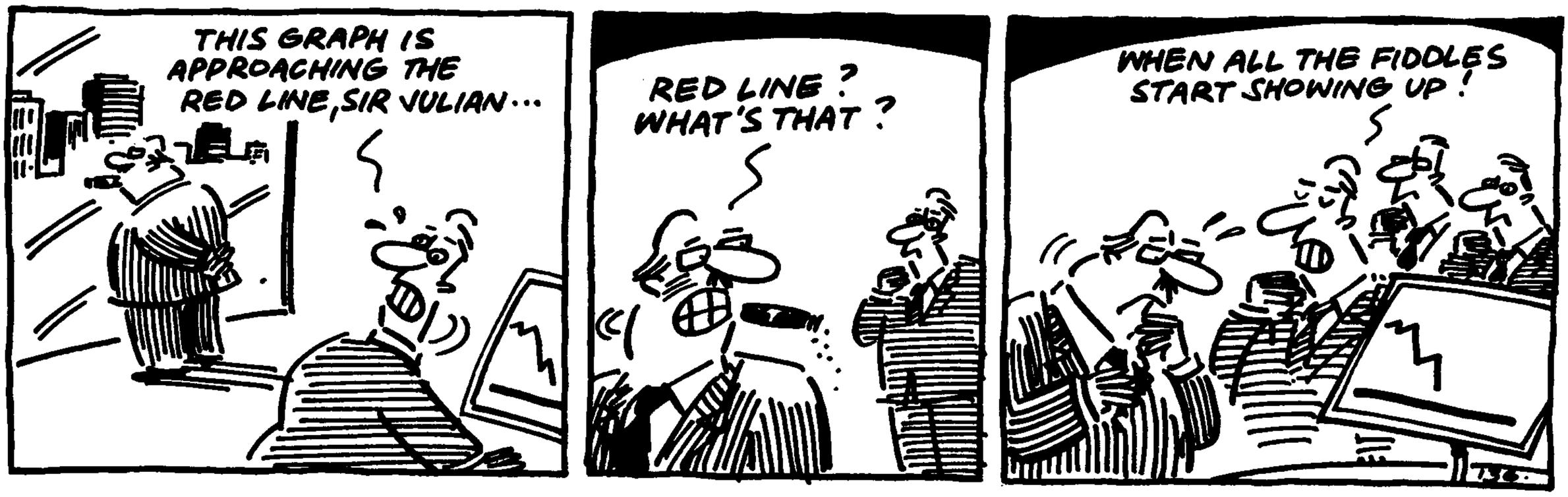
A month later securities regulators in Wisconsin obtained a restraining order against 711.TV, Hutchinson and two other directors for selling unregistered stock and misrepresentation. The misrepresentation included the claim that Jelley was a 711.TV director. Once again it appeared Merton and Jelley had been the unknowing victim of their clients. 711.TV and its directors consented to not doing securities business in Wisconsin.

Most recently Merton has been involved in plans for Huile Oil & Gas, another Nasdaq bulletin board play, to be the vehicle for a reverse takeover by iDirect – a company providing broadband internet access by satellite technology. iDirect's investors include News America, part of Murdoch's News Corporation, as well as two venture capitalists. Plans for the deal have been announced twice but it has yet to be consummated. Huile itself had income of just $7 at the last count and had been waiting for a deal to come along since it was formed by a group of investors headed by the former McDonalds manager from San Diego.

After making making losses in the past two years approaching £400,000 Merton and Jelley must be hoping the iDirect deal comes off.

THE LATEST embarrassment surrounding Prince Charles's Prince's Trust and Turkish businessman Cem Uzan – faced with jail in Britain for refusing to obey court orders stemming from a £2bn dispute with mobile phone giants Motorola – once again illustrates the difficulties the Prince gets into with his enthusiasm to raise cash for good works. The message from his courtiers is clear – those who give get access to HRH and Camilla at public functions and more importantly at private parties at his Highgrove home.

The Prince of Wales has been particularly successful in raising funds from American donors on this basis. America's super-rich are eager to be able to say they dined out with the man who might

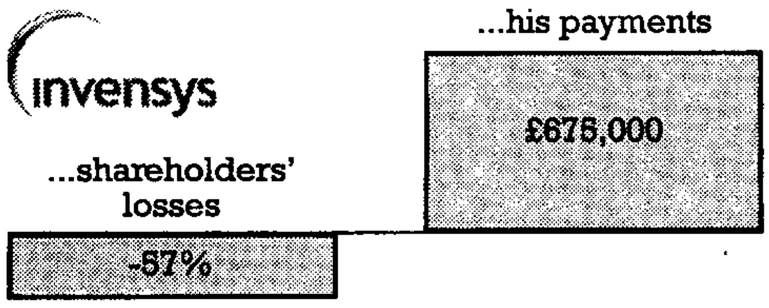


Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

British Airways' Lord Marshall strikes again...

Since Lord Marshall became chairman of conglomerate Siebe (now 'Invensys')...



be king. Something that *it might* be thought *money* cannot buy, but in fact does.

The Prince of Wales Foundation in Washington has more than doubled the donations it has received in the past two years. From $1.24m in 1999 the total donated rose to $2.62m for 2001 – the last year available. Six unidentified individuals gave between $75,000 and $500,000 each. Three gave $250,000 apiece.

Several of the donors – corralled by Geoffrey Kent of Florida-based upmarket travel group Abercrombie & Kent, whose personal life may have doomed any hopes of a knighthood for his services to the Prince's charity, and former Reagan fundraiser Robert Higdon – are regular givers and equally regular guests at royal functions in London, Holyrood and Highgrove.

Following the fallout from the US corporate scandals, no doubt the Prince's advisors will be checking to see that no other contributions from tainted donors are ticking away similar to those already revealed from Enron.

LAST MONTH'S appointment of former Tory MP Barry Legg as the party's new chief executive looks like another own goal, not only because of his right-wing credentials or the Shirley Porter Westminster connection but also because of his involvement in one of the more outrageous post-Maxwell pension fund rip-offs.

Before entering Parliament Legg was company secretary of food group Hillsdown Holdings. He was deeply involved in the management of the Hillsdown occupational pension funds being chairman of the trustees.

In 1989 Hillsdown transferred the £35m pension fund belonging to FMC, which it had taken over six years before, to a smaller group fund. Once that transfer was made Hillsdown repaid itself the £18.4m surplus from the former FMC fund – something it could not have done directly because the rules dictated that any surplus should be used only for the benefit of the FMC pensioners. Those pensioners were not informed of the surplus grab. They were told about a derisory improvement in their pensions. These transactions were overseen and approved by Legg.

When the £18m heist was discovered in 1992 two FMC pensioners complained to the Pensions Ombudsman who in 1995 ruled that Hillsdown was in " breach of trust" when it paid itself the surplus. The Ombudsman ordered the £18.4m should be repaid with interest. Hillsdown, headed by former Tory Cabinet minister Sir John Nott, appealed the decision.

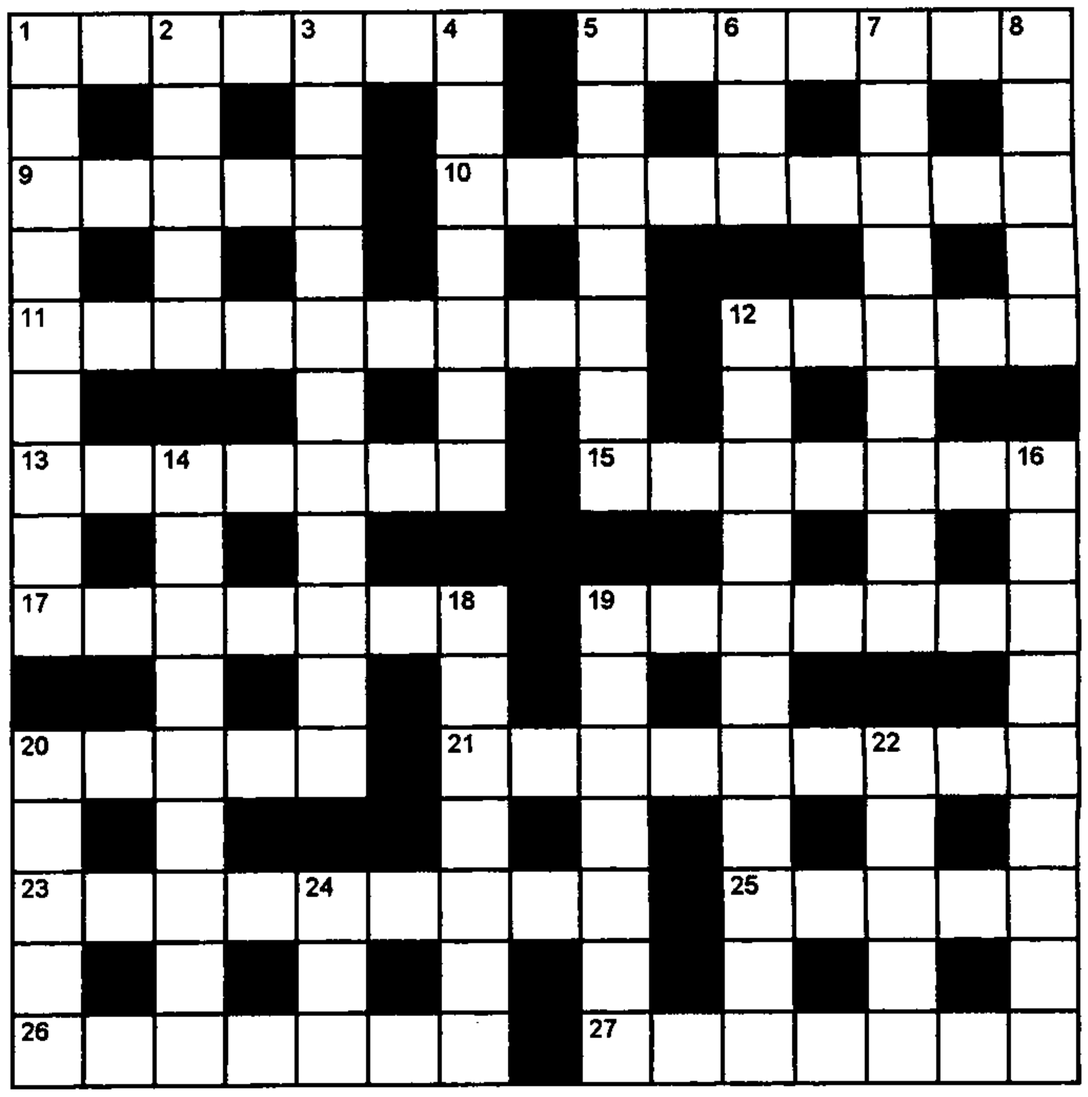
But in 1997 a High Court judge, Mr Justice Knox ruled that Hillsdown had been "unjustly enriched". "One only has to compare the position of Hillsdown who successfully wielded a big but misguided stick with that of members of the FMC scheme who were never told anything of what was being done as regards the payment of surplus to Hillsdown to see which way the scales of justice fall".

No doubt the Tory leader -- whoever that may be – will bear that in mind when entering into any debates with Labour on the hot issue of pensions.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 230

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 14 March 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 French castrated male broken by laser treatment (4,3)
5 Thatcher-style negotiating tool: giving worker the sack! (7)
9 Headless mutt's hole (5)
10 Fighters meant to get revitalised members (connectors inserted) (3-2-4)
11/12 The best singles Frenchman's orgasm (5,4,5)
13 Knocker-off of old lady's stereo's out of order (7)
15 Penis, having lost tip, was bloody prevented from getting a proper ride (7)
17 In lively movements, Brenda's going for one's nuts, put brutally (7)
19 To pissed reps, booze equals exercise (5-2)
20 Fanny, the pop singer's sweetheart, returns to museum & gets lost (5)
21 Overreact, giving it what for (5,1,3)
23 Cold mound snuggled against tool – how tawdry (9)
25 As all may see, one able to swing both ways in a group of cricketers is solid (5)
26 Knocking off Art, a wifeless pillock (3-1-3)
27 Matter-of-fact way of saying "It's subject to prohibition, head" (7)

DOWN

1 United to get Bill and Jonathan? Here's a starter clue (3,6)
2 Rupert's mate said "Pond life!" (5)
3 Pose Mozart incongruously with a load of fertilisers (11)
4 Zealous quiz-master of interest to blokes getting it up outside (7)
5 Sand dancing during *Little Darling*'s one sort of learning technique (5-2)
6 Freak sperm producer (3)
7 Blairs can change English for Italian hangers-on (9)
8 Puffs talk about turning over police sergeant (5)
12 Roy Webb jacked off missing journalist? That's a load of balls (11)
14 Loosened the belt to accommodate Brenda, our old monarch (9)
16 Makes you spit being surrounded by plonkers, nerds, etc. (9)
18 To be an MP (promiscuous), don't budge off your arse (3,4)
19 Was sick over Brenda – given a wigging (7)
20 Our Tony's number one estate? (5)
22 You'll have to get strong and fit for an Archer-style tale (5)
24 Drug has dictator half gone (3)

Crossword 229 winner: D. STEVENS

ACROSS: 1 Stink bomb 6 Kudos 9 Imply 10 On the make 11 Kill off 12 Lalique 13/23 Montezuma's revenge 16 Veto 19 Paps 20 Other ranks 22 Gay gene 25 Blackball 26 Tempi 27 Ether 28 Let us pray.

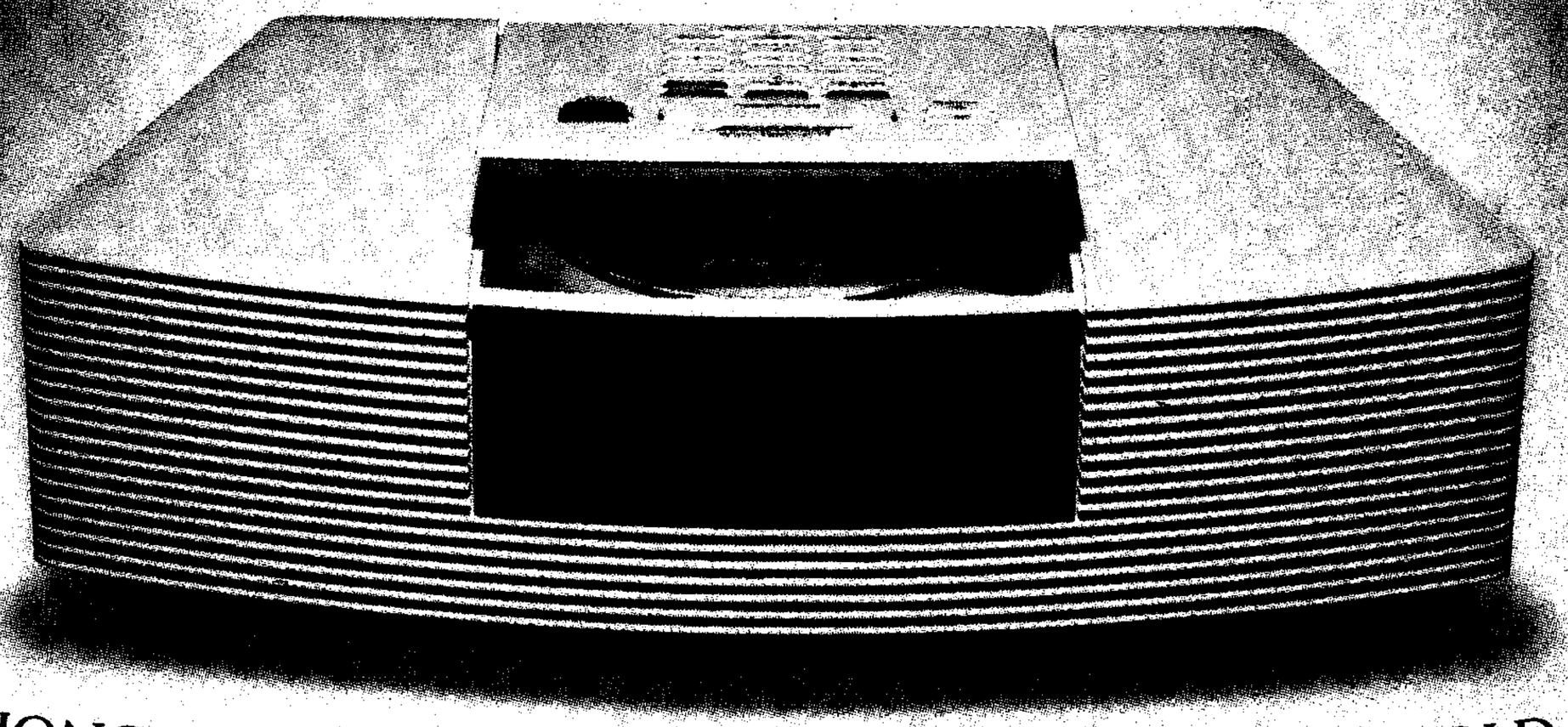
DOWN: 1 Stick 'em up 2 Impel 3 Keyholes 4 On-off 5 Battle-axe 6 Kneels 7 Drag queen 8 Scene 14 Nappy rash 15 Up the wall 17 Obscenity 18 Privates 21 Pecker 22 Gable 23 Relit 24 Namer.

Yobs

HUSBAND

Got a stag night and Wedding coming up, so I need a suit
MENS OUTFITTERS
Of course sir, what colour?
one that doesn't show up blood and vomit

PROOF
THAT *great* IDEAS GET HEARD.



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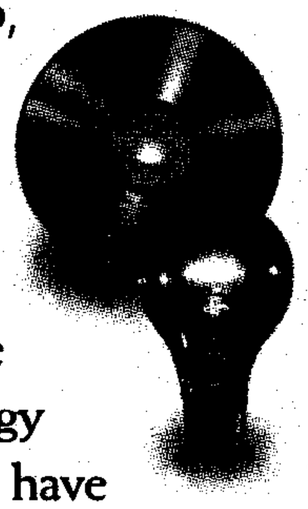
Forbes ASAP magazine rates the **Bose® Wave® radio** right up there with the light bulb, the compact disc and the telephone. Only fifteen inventions made their exclusive "All-Time A-List" of technology breakthroughs that have changed the world, and the Bose Wave® radio is one of them.



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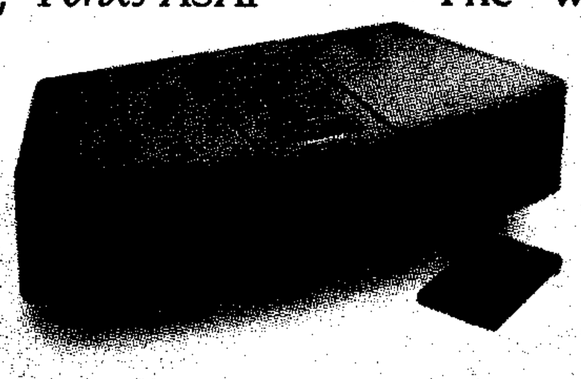

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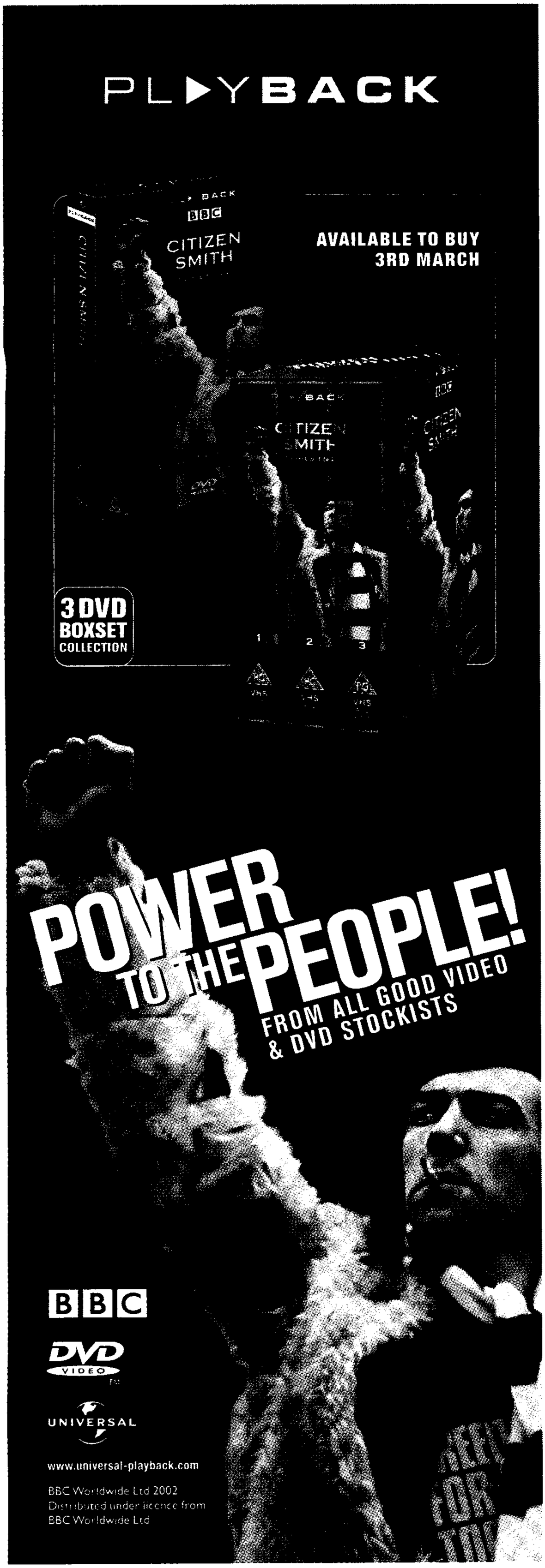

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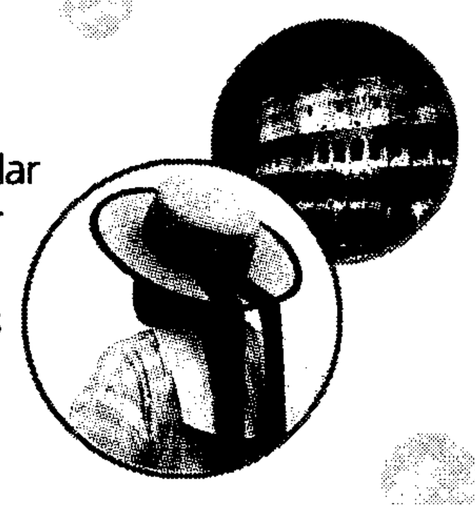

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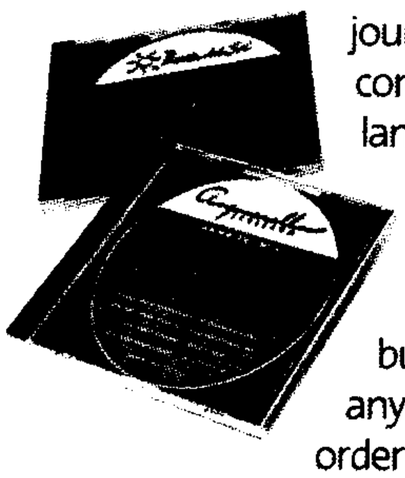

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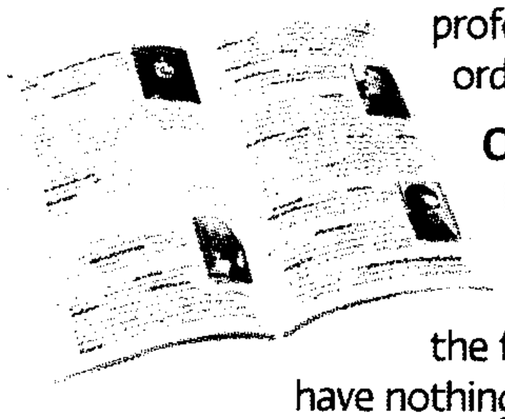

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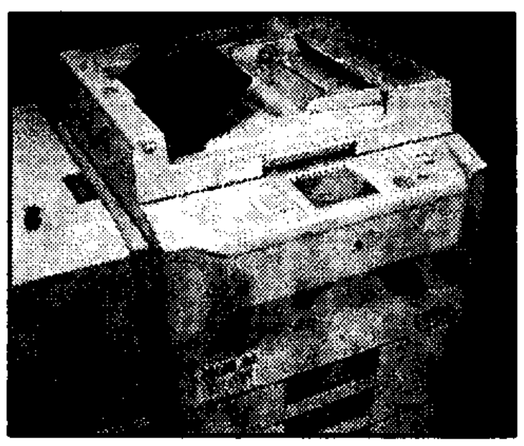

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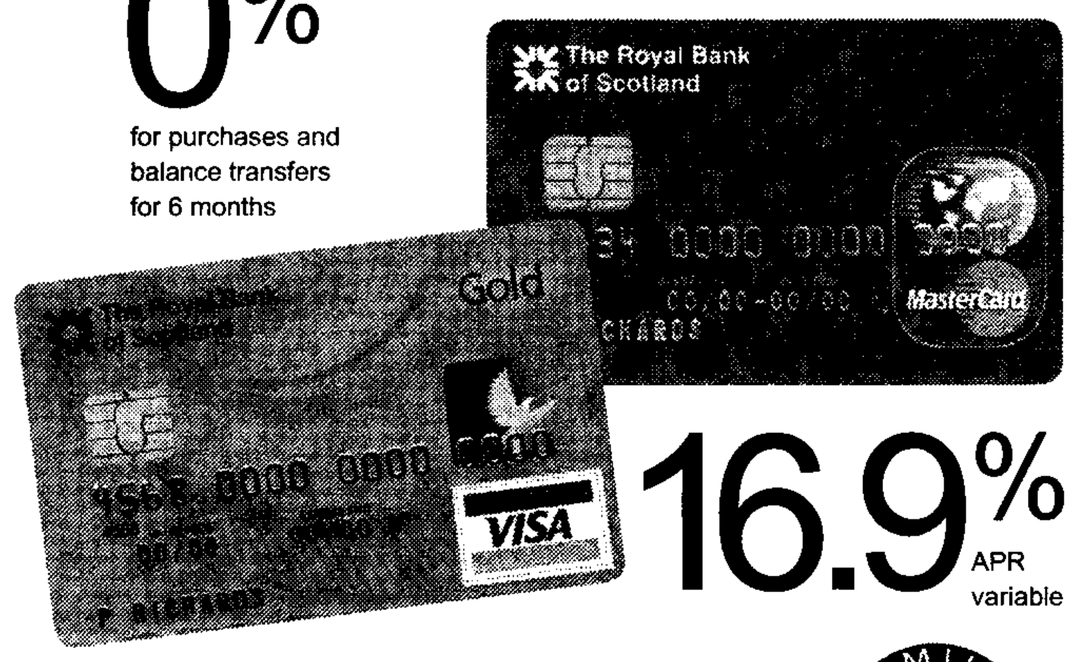

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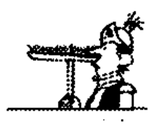

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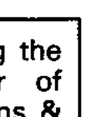

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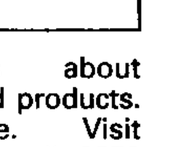

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